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# HISTORY

303<sup>RD</sup> ENGINEER (C) BATTALION



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## F O R E W O R D

*This is the story of the 303rd Engineer Combat Battalion from the day of its activation as a unit of the 78th division, through its training period and its months of combat in Germany, concluding with its final assignment to occupation duty in the American sector of Berlin.*

*To understand the work of the 303rd in the war against Germany, it is necessary to know the outline at least, of the history of the 78th Division's battles. We have presented the thread of this Division's achievements, but it is by no means a complete account.*

*In order to present the work of the Battalion in combat, and to avoid repetition where the various Companies have performed similar jobs, selection of representative incidents has been necessary. It would be impossible in the limited space of this book to give due recognition to all those members of the Battalion who have done their part so well in making the 303rd one of the finest Combat Engineer Battalions in the European Theatre.*

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## S T A F F

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Lt. Col. John J. Closner Jr.

## D E D I C A T I O N

*This work is dedicated to the Officers and Enlisted personnel of the 303rd Engineer Combat Battalion who served the unit so nobly during the period of training and subsequent combat.*

*It is further dedicated to the brave men who gave their lives for an ideal — the ideal that a democracy is the sole government for a free man and that subjugated peoples should be given a chance to register their desires.*

*In a world full of intrigue and unrest, the deeds of these men may go unnoticed by the great majority. In order to prevent such a tragedy, it is meant that this history should serve as a monument to the stalwart men of the 303rd Engineer Combat Battalion.*



- ① DEC 13<sup>TH</sup> THE "LIGHTNING" DIVISION SMASHED INTO THE SIEGFRIED LINE, MEETING STIFF OPPOSITION FROM VON RUNDSTEDT'S MOVING ARMY. MEN OF THE 76<sup>TH</sup> CAPTURED ROLLESBROICH, WITZERATH, BICKERATH AND SIMMERATH.
- ② DEC 17<sup>TH</sup> THE "LIGHTNING" DIVISION ASSUMED THE DEFENSIVE TO HOLD ITS SALIENT ON THE NORTH FLANK OF THE ARDENNES COUNTEROFFENSIVE.
- ③ JAN 30<sup>TH</sup> "LIGHTNING" DIVISION JUMPED OFF WITH ITS STRIKE AIMED AT THE KEY TO THE ROER VALLEY, THE MIGHTY SCHWAMMENAU DAM. THE FIGHT MOVED SOUTH FROM SIMMERATH TO CAPTURE THE TOWNS OF KONZEN, IMGENBROICH, EICHERSCHIED, HAMMER AND RUHRBERG THEN NORTH THROUGH STRAUCH STECKENBORN AND SCHMIDT UNTIL ON THE NIGHT OF FEB 9<sup>TH</sup> "LIGHTNING" MEN CROSSED THE DAM.
- ④ FEB 28<sup>TH</sup> THE "LIGHTNING" DIVISION DROVE ACROSS THE ROER CLEARING THE FLANK FOR THE FORTHCOMING REMAGEN BRIDGEHEAD.
- ⑤ MAR 8<sup>TH</sup> THE "LIGHTNING" DIVISION HAD CROSSED THE RHINE AT REMAGEN AND CONTINUED THE FIGHT TO EXPAND THE BRIDGEHEAD. THE 76<sup>TH</sup> DIVISION WAS IN THE VANGUARD EAST OF THE RHINE RIVER.
- ⑥ MAR 21<sup>ST</sup> THE "LIGHTNING" DIVISION REACHED THE SIEG RIVER AND PROTECTED THE LEFT FLANK OF THE FIRST ARMY BY HOLDING A LINE 30 MILES LONG ON ITS NORTH FLANK.
- ⑦ APR 6<sup>TH</sup> THE "LIGHTNING" DIVISION STARTED THE DRIVE TO CLEAN OUT THE RUHR POCKET. ELEVEN DAYS LATER THE DIVISION WAS IN WUPPERTAL AWAITING ORDERS FOR MOVEMENT TO A NEW AREA. THE POCKET WAS "KAPUT"
- ⑧ APR 18<sup>TH</sup> THE "LIGHTNING" DIVISION MOVED TO DILLENBURG TO SECURE AN EXTENSIVE AREA OF THIRTY-SIX HUNDRED SQUARE MILES.

## AACHEN





# A C T I V A T I O N

In April of 1942, at Fort Belvoir, Virginia, the first group of men was brought together to form what is now known as the "Old Cadre" of the 303rd Engineer Battalion. This Battalion was fortunate in having cadre-men previously trained in engineering procedure at Fort Belvoir. To these non-coms, much credit is due for the establishment of the well-groomed battalion that supported the 78th Division throughout training, maneuvers, and finally, combat. Although at that time they regarded combat as something quite far removed from them, they were soon to realize that their every action henceforth was to revolve about combat training, tactics, and maneuvers.

Before the month of April was over, they were all shipped to Fort Bragg, South Carolina, where they experienced tough and specialized field training, the handling of men, and the development of engineering specialties.

On July 17, 1942, they left Fort Bragg for Camp Butner, North Carolina. A bitter sight greeted them as they rolled off the train with their belongings.

The camp was a sea of mud and a virtual forest of trees. The men had hardly been assigned to billets when they were called out to make a camp out of the dismal area. Cutting trees, blowing stumps, building roads, and the general overhauling of all billets were but a few of the tasks that consumed so much of their stay at Camp Butner. Those who knew the camp at that time, and have seen it since, are profuse in their praise for the men whose planning and work wrought such a remarkable change.

On August 15, 1942, the 78th Division was formally activated. On that day, Cadre-men from each unit in the Division were addressed





by General Edwin P. Parker Jr., 78th Division Commander, the Governor of North Carolina, and the Post Commander of Camp Butner. The men were told that they were to be the nucleus of a division of which they would always be proud—a division that would win new battle honors to add to the impressive list compiled by the 78th in World War I. It is to these men that credit must be given for the splendid leadership that prepared the Lightning soldiers for combat.

At the outset, the 303rd Engineer Battalion was commanded by Colonel Markham. The Colonel made certain that every officer and cadremán realized the importance of the task that confronted him. The staff's first objective was assurance that they, themselves, were ready to properly prepare a battalion of engineer trainees. So, while waiting for their charges, the original staff brushed up on the technical points of combat engineering.

In February, the first selectees began to trickle in; by the first of March the Division was up to strength, the unit breakdowns had been completed, and the Battalion was ready for a stiff training schedule.

Early in April of 1943, Colonel Markham was called to a new command. Every man regarded his going as a personal loss, for he had endeared himself to all his men in the short time he was Commanding Officer.

The Battalion's first sight of their new C.O. was at the traditional battalion review. Major Grennan formed the four companies into a square, and addressed them from the center. The Major promised that, like the formation, the men could depend upon him to be on the square with them at all times. From that day on, he was commonly known about the barracks as "On the square" Grennan. And so he remained, both in speech and in practice, for the remainder of his stay with the Battalion.

July found the battalion still working and toughening up. The men had undergone the maze of MTP training, Unit Training, and RTC problems, with weekly inspections, training tests, and a few passes.







Late in the month, the unit donned field packs, shouldered M-1's, and set out on what proved to be the longest and toughest of the Battalion's hikes. Those who were lucky enough to be on furlough at the time can smile at mention of the Crabtree Hike; the others still grimace, and visions of the dry, tortuous, never-ending 70-mile heatway flit through their minds. The burning and aching feet, parched throats, and backs screaming for rest are thoughts deeply ingrained in the memories of all that "Old Crew".

Thoughts turn quickly from torture to merriment, however, when the old timers think of evenings in Durham and the water training trips to South Boston, where everyone learned to swim and row assault boats. Colonel Closner was the new Battalion C.O., having taken over at the height of the training period, in September.

Back to Butner the Battalion rolled once more for D-Series maneuvers in the woods near camp, and the North Carolina chiggers began fattening up. It was hard sleeping (or trying to sleep) out under the canvas—beating off mass mosquito assaults—when the inviting barracks, with comfortable beds were so close at hand. They stuck it out, though, and another South Boston trip soon took their minds off the hardships.

A long list of proficiency achievements was accredited the Sparky Engineers as they finished their second stay at the lake. Each line company had casually taken its turn at smashing the Belvoir record for construction of the 100-foot Infantry foot bridge, against time. Support rafts and a long list of field expedient crossing measures were effected, with still time enough left in the evenings for swimming, rowing, and some fishing.

South Carolina maneuvers was the Division's first real field training as a unit. Orders called for a month's training, and by that time they had covered a thousand miles of territory. No sooner had one problem ended when a new situation was devised, and "war" started all over again.

"We had good maneuver weather all month," Sgt. "Moose" Uhlrich remembers, "But Thanksgiving dinner was a day late, and that wasn't so good."





Lt. Broadwater remembers when he was 1st platoon Sgt. in B Company, and orders came that the attack was coming and to blow all bridges. The bridges had been prepared—all 29 of them—but the plan was to simulate the actual blowing. Within the short space of an hour's time, Sgt. Broadwater had carried out orders explicitly; his supporting elements had no possible means of maneuvering to or from the assembly area, for every bridge in the surrounding countryside was splintered firewood.

Camp Butner looked mighty inviting and comfortable to the Battalion this time, as the men dragged their mud-caked belongings back into the barracks. A short stay brought about preparations for another, longer, and more extensive maneuver. Ole Man Winter caught the 303rd on the move as they left Butner this time, on January 22, 1944, for a four-day truck ride to the Tennessee Maneuver area.

Tanks churned the cold, sodden ground, planes strafed and bombed, and the sweaty, mud-caked doughs slogged on ahead—Tennessee Maneuvers had begun. For nearly three months, the 78th, 17th Airborne, the 106th, and the 26th Divisions fought it out, back and forth across the Tennessee hills, plains and rivers. Orders called for tactical operational problems, each lasting one week, with week-ends off to re-group forces, catch a little sleep, or maybe even go to church. Normal procedure placed two divisions on the offensive, against one on the defensive, and all types of situations ever expected to be encountered were simulated.

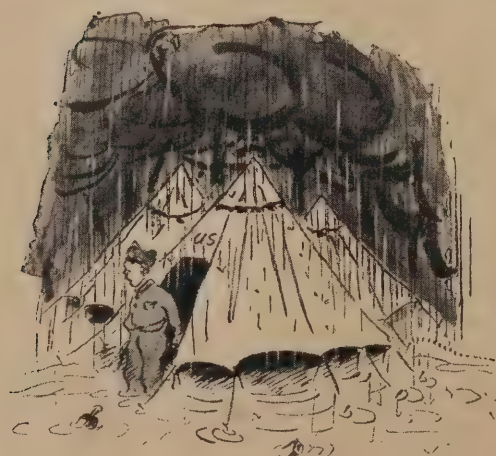
It was on one of the moves, during a break, that 1st Lieutenant Carpenter was sent ahead to establish a bivouac area for the Battalion.

"Suddenly I realized that I had been following a contour line, thinking it was a road, and I knew that I was hopelessly lost," he remembers. He contacted Colonel Closner on his radio, and attempted to orient himself

as he rode along. Suddenly the jeep rounded a corner: slid to a stop, and there, almost bumper to bumper to him was the Colonel with the rest of the battalion, giving him directions over the "300".

"It was rough, explaining the lack of a bivouac area to the Colonel, but at least I wasn't lost anymore," muses Lieutenant Carpenter.

The mud and cold were the most bitter enemies, for once the men's bedding got wet, it couldn't be dried





out. Most men worked, ate, slept, and played poker in the same uniform—consisting of every article of clothing the army had issued them.

"Never before or since have I encountered so much rain and mud," says T/5 Sprengel. "One Saturday morning I woke up suddenly, and found that I had floated half-way out of my tent. Another five minutes asleep, and I probably would have drowned right there."

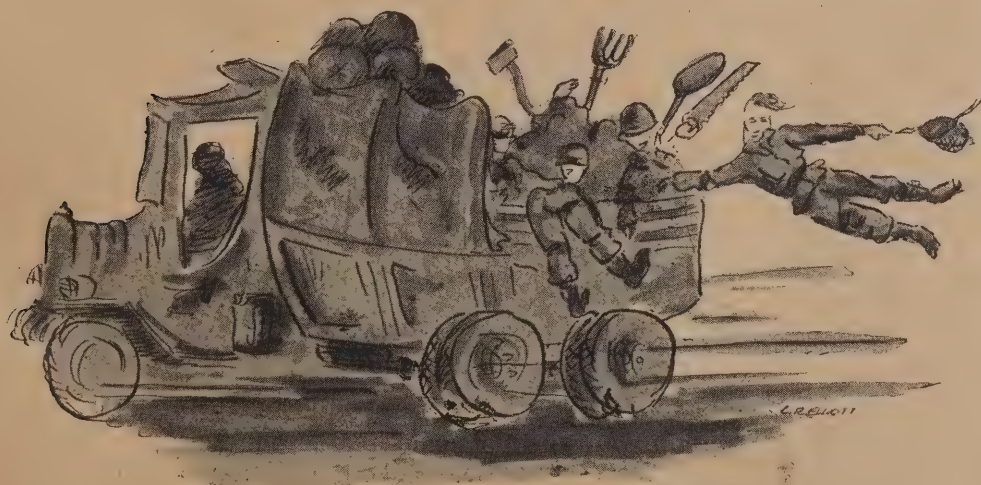
The long, hard days were alleviated by occasional trips to Nashville, where the men could see movies, take showers, and get a nice hot meal. If you met the right person, a little dealing would gain a jug of "white lightning" that would help warm up the tents and stop the poison of snake bites.

"A" Company remembers the night Sergeant Carlberg took over the National Barn Dance in Nashville with his train whistle and cowboy songs.

The hard, cold, muddy work of Tennessee Maneuvers culminated in an assault crossing of the Cumberland River at flood stage. The roaring waters offered a mighty obstacle to the engineers, who were to row the infantry across. It was the toughest job yet—taking the assault boats across, loaded, and then bringing them back, empty. The current was so swift that the boats were carried downstream, some as much as three-quarters of a mile, and then they had to be carried up the bank to the starting points. It took all night, but the crossing was successful. Many days were spent locating all the equipment that the current had carried off.

The contesting divisions were carefully judged by a group of "Black Flag" referees, with emphasis upon combat effectiveness. The 78th Division, with supporting elements, received distinctive praise and highest honors for its maneuver ability.

Trucks were moving through the heavy rain and slush, when suddenly one skidded sideways and overturned, pinning its occupants beneath the rushing waters of the drainage ditch. Realizing the imminent danger,







several witnesses attempted to reach the men and get them out. Seeing that the men were failing, Pvt. R. L. Leimer swam into the roaring waters and succeeded in extricating his imprisoned buddies. For risking his life, and his devotion to duty, Pvt. Leimer received the Soldiers' Medal, presented to him by General Parker at Camp Pickett.

## C A M P P I C K E T T

Pickett was a typical Army camp, practical but unattractive. It wasn't long, though, before we were at work again—planting grass, building sidewalks, pulling stumps and in general bringing the camp up to 78th standards.

Meanwhile, those men who had not received furloughs during maneuvers were leaving daily for their stay at home. Week-end passes to nearby cities such as Richmond, Durham, or Washington, D.C., among others, made life a little brighter for most of us. But Blackstone, Va., (often referred to as Tombstone) was in a class by itself. Situated a short distance from camp, quiet, rural Blackstone was jammed with fun-seeking soldiers on short passes.

It seemed like the Division would never go overseas (or so most of us thought in those days). Instead, we continued training, as usual... mines, bridges, hikes, close-order drill, and the inevitable obstacle course.

On May 22 our depleted ranks were reinforced by a group of ASTP students who had been attending various U.S. colleges. We weren't quite sure how it would be with a bunch of "school-boys" in the Battalion, but we discovered that most of them had already completed Engineer basic. However, they were put through the mill again, getting a refresher course for seven weeks with the Infantry Regiments, and several weeks' training under Battalion non-commissioned officers.

During the summer months, training was conducted to prepare each soldier for his part in the work of the squad, platoon and company. Such things as map-reading, use of the compass, enemy mines, boobytraps,



and firing of such weapons as the M1 rifle, carbine, machine-gun, bazooka, grenades—were all mastered. We built bridges, practiced demolition work, made river crossings, and participated in a number of realistic combat problems.

Assisting in training of the infantry regiments of the 78th Division, platoons moved out for short periods to A. P. Hill, Va., and Prince Edward Forest, N. C.

At A. P. Hill we had the problem of furnishing simulated enemy artillery for the infantry. We placed charges of TNT in trees and as the infantry advanced, we set off the charges. Since the Cannon Companies were firing live rounds over their heads at the same time, the TNT explosions were quite a surprise to the doughs. It did, however, teach them to hit the ground. One infantry sergeant was so excited that he started out after the Engineers with a carbine, threatening to use the live rounds in his weapon. These combat problems were exceedingly realistic down to the last detail. We were glad that casualties were few.

At Prince Edward Forest we again assisted in the training of infantrymen in the methods of assault crossings, swimming, and the operation of various army assault craft. Foot bridges were built and many different types of assault rafts were constructed.

During July a mine school was conducted by the Battalion for selected officers and non-coms throughout the Division. The school was arranged to instruct the whole Division in the operation and use of American mines as well as all foreign mines. Many interesting experiments were performed to show the power of various mines and booby-traps. It was here that many became acquainted with the Teller mine, "S" mine, and other German mines about which we later learned a great deal more. The school was under the supervision of Lt. Gordon S. Young, with Lt. Glendon Timm, Lt. James St. James Hughes, Lt. Milton F. Michener and Lt. William Carpenter assisting in the instruction of the classes.





D-Day in Normandy had come and the Allied invasion of Europe was proceeding successfully. Naturally, we felt the elation that any American feels when he knows that his countrymen are doing a job well. Yet the day seemed to draw near when we might be on our way to the CBI.

Training went on and was even intensified. The combat courses in Camp Pickett were a large help in learning the procedure of actual combat. We will never forget the long march through the Virginia woods which led to an objective which we were to take. We were judged by infantry officers as to how we approached the objective, the discipline of the men, use of concealment and cover, the tactics used, and finally the number of hits scored on the silhouette targets.

The night problems at Pickett will live long in the memory of those who participated in them. Once we went out at night and put in a complete mine field. This, of course, was tactical, and the darkness and heat made it quite miserable. The night compass problem was an unforgettable experience. Many of the squads waded through hip-deep water and muddy swamps. The dense woods were not unlike jungles, while a steady rain made the night pitch-black. One or two squads managed to complete the course, and we returned for the welcome snack of cake and coffee at midnight.

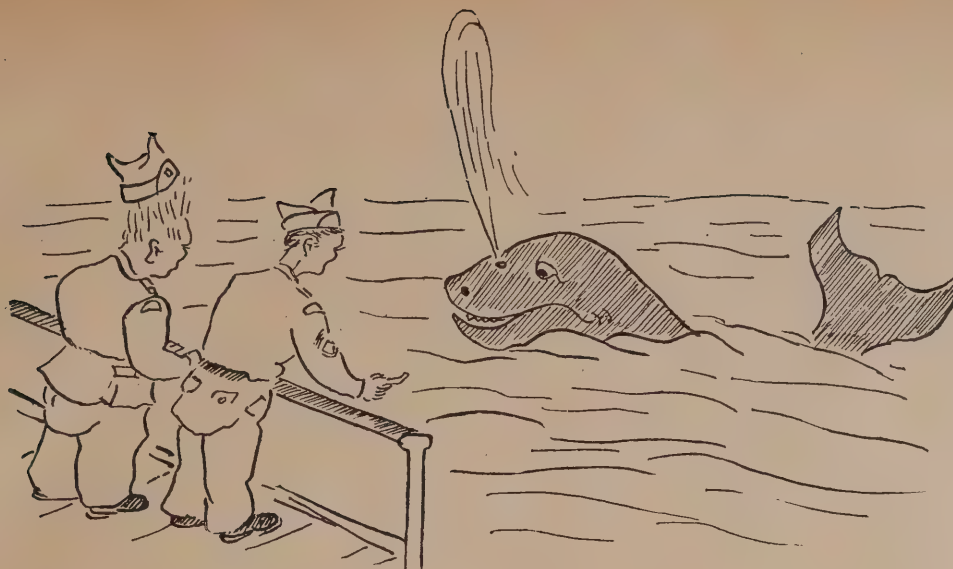
Where mention should be made here of the four-mile "rat race." Early in the morning, we would fall out fully-equipped and try to hike four miles in less than fifty-minutes. We did it with plenty of time to spare.

Rumors were thick all over the Division in August... CBI, ETO, Alaska, Panama, Washington, D. C., were only a few of the places that we were going. However, most of us had the old pessimistic feeling that it was our fate to spend the rest of our days in training.

Furloughs again!! "It isn't possible", we thought, but it was and men were leaving all the time. This was an occasion for more rumors. Overseas in two months was quite a popular theory. Others still maintained, "Never".







"WE ARE GOING OVERSEAS". This was no rumor. We awoke one day to find ourselves taking the POM physical. It was extremely rough. Those who could see the doctor and crawl out were Class 1.

For the next several weeks we were subjected to the Army's specialty—the clothing and equipment check. At least once a day, and more often twice, we laid out every stitch and stood by our bunks for the inspection.

In August, the Camp Pickett "Box Factory" really got to work. We helped turn out boxes of all sizes and shapes in which to pack the equipment of the entire Division.

5 October . . . we were ready to move. We saw our last of Camp Pickett from the window of a train going north.

6 October . . . we arrived in Camp Kilmer, N.J. We were quarantined for 48 hours for "processing", equipment checks, shots, talks on censorship, insurance, how to enter and leave a train in a hurry, and another of those rough physicals. Here, if you could open your mouth and manipulate certain parts of the anatomy correctly . . . you were in. There was a lighter side—all of us were allowed a short pass to New York City. We knew that this would be our last pass on this side of the ocean. We enjoyed the Big City.

On the 13th of October, we left Kilmer on troop trains to travel to the New York Port of Embarkation. At the dock, we found Red Cross girls waiting to serve us coffee and doughnuts. We boarded the troopship that evening, with many misgivings on the part of the more superstitious. The next day found us at sea. We had all tried to get that last glimpse of the Statue of Liberty.

Our ship was the S. S. John Ericksson, flagship of the convoy. In our convoy, besides troopships, were cargo vessels, tankers, and destroyer escorts for protection.

Ocean travel was a new experience for most of us, and riding on a troopship was doing it the hard way. Fortunately, we did have pleasant weather and on the whole, an uneventful trip. But there were some things



we'll never forget, like the overcrowded sleeping quarters, the steaming-hot dining hall, and the salt-water showers. The long trip was made more bearable by such things as the jam sessions on deck by the 309th Regimental Band, reading innumerable detective stories, and an occasional movie. We also had a few classes on board. We were oriented on a few of the tasks of combat engineers, and classes were held on the history and customs of the English and French people, as well as the use of common phrases in French and German. Life was made a little more exciting when a whale, or submarine or torpedo was "sighted", but, strangely, it could never be verified because of lack of witnesses. Still, at regular intervals we had emergency drill and we hustled to our boat stations expectantly, only to be sent back.

On the 24th of October, we finally sighted land. The next day, we sailed close enough to see little villages nestled among the orchards on the coast of England. At last we anchored in a bay, where we stayed for the rest of the day. As the ship neared the harbor, the general rush of the men to see land caused the ship to list badly to the port side. The Captain had to make repeated threats of sending the men to their compartments below before he could get the men to even up the load on the deck. We moved on into the port of Southampton and docked, getting our first view of some of the air-raid damage. There was a British band present to greet us. The happy G.I.'s threw cigarettes and candy to the Britishers on the dock until they were asked to stop."

It was October 26 when we disembarked and travelled by train to Christchurch, England. The whole Battalion was billeted in an old Barracks formerly used by the Royal Artillery. We noticed at once the difference in the houses and the winding roads with cars running on the left side of the road. It was here that we saw the signs of the preparations to repel a German invasion of England—the barbed-wire entanglements, the British version of dragon's teeth, prepared road blocks, and camouflaged blockhouses. Along the beaches the British had built steel frames to stop invasion boats, had mined areas and laid miles of pipe to carry oil into the sea which could be set ablaze in case of invasion. This brought home to us the peril of the British in the days when invasion seemed likely.



After we docked at Southampton we received our first mail since leaving the States, and many home-sick boys were cheered by those letters from their loved ones.

We were soon on a training schedule. After physical training and the inevitable close-order drill, we had a chance to learn



more about German weapons, mines, etc. There were a few hikes over the English countryside and we practised assaults on pill-boxes and made river-crossings.

One of the highlights of Christchurch was the Bailey Bridge Experimental Station situated at the Barracks. We met Mr. Bailey himself, and found him a very likeable gentleman, who had invented the famous steel bridge, and had given his plans to the British government. Many of us drank bitters at the pub at his expense, but a few firmly believed that anyone who could invent so much work for us to do could hardly be a "good Joe".

We will never forget the "Soldier Home" conducted by the Salvation Army across the street from the Barracks. We soon labelled it the "Old Soldier's Home", but it was here that we could get a cup of tea or coffee and several types of sandwiches for our evening snack.

Frequent passes gave us a chance to visit nearby towns and some got to visit London. V-bombs were coming over frequently in those days. Entertainment was available in the form of movies, stage shows and dances. There was a shortage of food, but you didn't have much trouble getting an order of fish and chips, sausages, and just plain chips. Of course, we soon knew the difference between mild and bitters. And we were also proud of the expert way we dealt in English money, whether it be pence, shillings, or pounds.

All this time we were receiving additional equipment, new trucks, jeeps, and various supplies which we would need for the job ahead. On November 19 we were ready. We entrained for Portland, where we boarded LST's for the trip across the Channel.

We finally crossed the channel after waiting until the weather was favorable. For five days we were forced to remain anchored in the bay at Le Havre. Although the water was very calm compared to the rough channel, the small LST boats kept up a constant rolling which did little to aid digestion. Most of us will not forget the Thanksgiving Day we spent on the LST's. Few of us ever enjoyed a Thanksgiving Dinner less.







Part of the Battalion disembarked at Le Havre. The remainder of the men journeyed up the Seine River to Rouen and moved to an assembly area near Yvetot, France, where the Battalion made final preparations for the next day's motor march northward. We were all impressed both by the terrible bomb damage at Le Havre and Rouen and the huge quantities of destroyed German vehicles and equipment along the south bank of the Seine. On the following morning we departed in our trucks. In the next 48 hours we saw the rolling countryside of northern France, with its many orchards and green pastureland and the small, neat towns.

As we approached our destination, Herderen, Belgium, on November 27, we heard a roar and saw the flames shooting from the V-1 bombs the Germans were sending over. It was an awe-inspiring thing to see those buzzbombs. They came over regularly, sometimes two at a time. Arriving in Herderen late at night, we slept outdoors in our sleeping bags, and we could hear and watch bombs pass overhead all night long. The next day we moved into our billets, which were haylofts for most of us. Some were fortunate enough to be put up in the homes of our Belgian hosts.

During our brief stay in Herderen we were issued our first ammunition, as well as bazooka shells and rifle grenades. On December 7, we moved from Herderen to the Forest of Eupen in the vicinity of Raeren, Belgium, where completion of pre-combat preparation was accomplished. Enforcement of blackout and concealment wrought a special hardship here as we were not allowed to build fires on the cold and dark nights. On the 12th of December we travelled again by motor convoy to Rötgen Germany, where direct contact with the enemy was first made by the Battalion.



# CRACKING THE SIEGFRIED LINE

On the Western Front in early December, the Ninth Army was poised along the Roer River, preparing to push across into the Rhineland. This operation was being held up however, until possession of the Roer River Dams was secured by the First Army. With these dams under German control, by demolition a wall of water could be sent down the Roer to wash out any attempted crossing and isolate our bridgeheads beyond rescue.

The 78th Division was assigned the task of securing the largest and most important of these Roer Dams—the Schwammenauel, but between us and this dam rose the vaunted Siegfried Line. The Division sector lay along the First Army front, just south and east of Lammersdorf, a small town approximately nine miles south-east of Aachen.

The Siegfried Line was not a line at all, but a belt of defenses, three to ten miles deep, consisting of ingeniously camouflaged pill boxes, interlaced with miles of dragons teeth defenses. These concrete and steel bunkers were reinforced with extensive minefields, barbed wire entanglements, intricate networks of entrenchments, and concealed machine gun nests. Every avenue of approach was carefully covered by artillery and mortar fire.

On December 9, 1944, the first Platoon of C Company, in support of the 311th Infantry Regiment, moved into the Hürtgen Forest on detached service with the 8th Division. We were there from December 9 until December 24, 15 days in all. The 8th Division was to the north of us, fighting in and out of Vossenack; the 102nd Cavalry and the 2nd Ranger Battalion, with elements of our own 78th, extended southward toward Lammersdorf. That left us in the woods with the enemy comfortably situated in the Siegfried Line's concrete pill boxes along the east and west banks of the Kall River, and it was up to the Engineers to help the infantry dig them out.

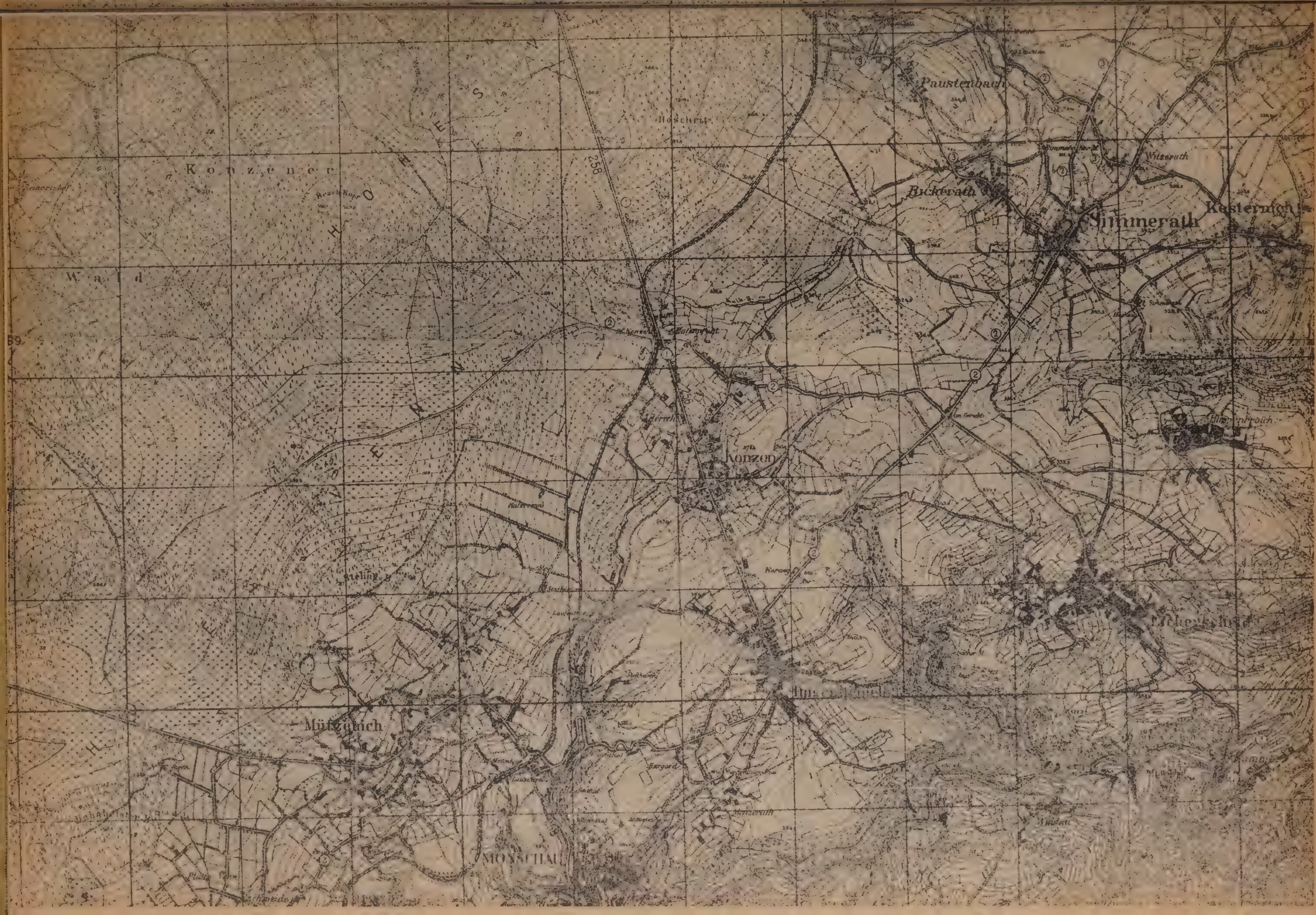
At this time the Hürtgen Forest was a mass of snow covered mud and shell-splintered pine trees. The first thing our lieutenant told us to do was to find a home. Log and dirt huts of a sort were already up, but they all needed a little repair work before they could be occupied. Most of them had water in the bottoms, and Sgt. Steffen picked the poorest one of the bunch. He had to throw in pine boughs until he raised the level of the floor above the water line.

















The first task of the platoon was to maintain a portion of the main supply route to the forward area, a mile stretch of hub-deep mud, 500 yards from the front lines. We cut drainage ditches with picks and shovels until our lieutenant managed to borrow a bulldozer from the 8th Division Engineers.

Some of the men cut logs to corduroy part of the road, but had to be continuously careful of the mines and booby traps the Germans had sown so thickly in the woods.

On December 12, along about midnight, the men were roused from the warm comfort of their sacks to support the Infantry in the first attack to be made by the men of the 78th Division. We prepared demolition charges by candle light and took turns drinking hot coffee in the back of the chow truck.

The lieutenant told us the 311th was to perform a diversionary move in coordination with the main attack farther south. Our objective was five pill boxes in the Siegfried Line.

The platoon was divided into small groups, each group going with a platoon of infantry. When the attack came the Germans countered with such a concentration of mortar and small arms fire that further progress was impossible. The infantry received orders to withdraw.

Sgt. Paul Steffen and Pfc. John Coyle, the Engineer medic, were in the lead of one group of infantry. When the barrage started, an infantry sergeant was wounded. "Doc" Coyle remained to tend the infantryman's wounds while Steffen covered him. When they turned to rejoin our troops, they were fired on by the enemy and were forced to dig in. They remained in hiding in the middle of an enemy mortar section for fifteen hours before they could return. Sgt. Steffen reported the location of the German mortars so they could be neutralized by our artillery.

In the same attack, on another section of the front, Pfc. Richard Quick was killed while assaulting a pillbox.

Later, our infantry fought its way into Simonskall. There the enemy had destroyed a bridge across the Kall River, and the task of measuring the stream for a new bridge fell to the Engineers. Lt. Everett Siegele, with Pfc. Charlie Sisk and Pvt. Benjamin Chalmers, made the reconnaissance at night. While they were moving from the forward infantry command post to the bridge site, the Krauts opened up with a mortar barrage, but no one was hurt. It had been reported that the place was thick with enemy boobytraps so the men were forced to proceed on their hands and knees in search of trip wires. Lt. Siegele waded the stream, and found later that our own infantry had planted trip flares up and down it in case of an enemy counterattack.

For a long time the infantry had been fighting in and out of Vossenack, but now the town was ours, and we wanted to make sure we could keep it. Sgt. Lawrence Higgins led a group of men, T/5 Willie St. Pierre,





Pfc. Charles Hrach, Pvt. Pasquale Gullow, and Pvt. Carelton Friebe, on a mine-laying mission. Under enemy observation they laid 23 anti-personnel mines and trip flares over a 130 yard gulley where the enemy might try a counterattack.

At 0600, the 13th of December, the 309th and the 310th Infantry Regiments pushed forward on a surprise attack. Such was the surprise that many Germans manning forward outposts soon found themselves surrounded. But when the Germans realized that their positions were being challenged, they began throwing in everything they had.

Because of the extensive anti-tank mine fields, the infantrymen were deprived of the assistance of our armor in taking their initial objectives, which were the small towns of Rollesbroich, Witzerath, Bickerath, Simmerath, and Kesternich. The most important task, therefore, of Engineer Companies "A" and "B", was to breach gaps in these mine-fields and to clear mined roads so that the armor could move in comparative safety to give badly needed support to the attacking infantry. While this was being done by some of us, others moved up with the infantry. They had the task of locating, marking, and removing the soldiers' most dreaded foe—the hidden and deadly anti-personnel mine.

The forward attack had passed on but had left many men maimed and wounded. On the left of the road, just out of Witzerath, a large, well-camouflaged Schu-mine field had protected the approaches to a machine-gun nest, and had claimed three infantry casualties. Two medics, attempting to aid the men, had also struck Schu-mines, and volunteers were called for from the Engineers to get the men out. Cpl. Woodrow Dennison of the 1st Platoon, A Company set out, and soon probed into a Schu-mine which exploded in his face. T/5 Raymond Sprenkel then offered to try driving his "cat" across the field to the wounded, and Pfc. Arthur Reynolds, 3rd Platoon medic climbed on to care for the men as soon as they were reached.

Under heavy artillery and mortar fire the two proceeded through the field, exploding so many mines that several cleats were blown from the



"cat". The two succeeded in reaching the wounded, and "Doc" Reynolds evacuated the infantrymen from the cold snowdrifts.

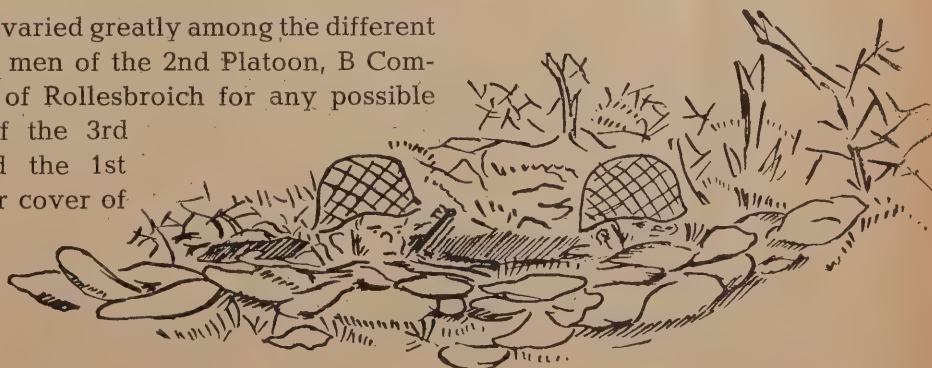
The first awards in the Battalion, and among the first in the Division, were received by these two men Bronze Stars, for "Action beyond the call of duty", were pinned on by Colonel Closner.

The clearing of the anti-tank mines was a slow and dangerous mission, as the roads were under constant shelling by German mortars and "88's"; but by nightfall several miles of road had been cleared, and the infantry had reached four out of five of their initial objectives. "A" Company was caught on the road from Lammersdorf to Witzerath by terrific mortar barrages and suffered 11 casualties—the greatest number any company in the Battalion had in any one day in combat.

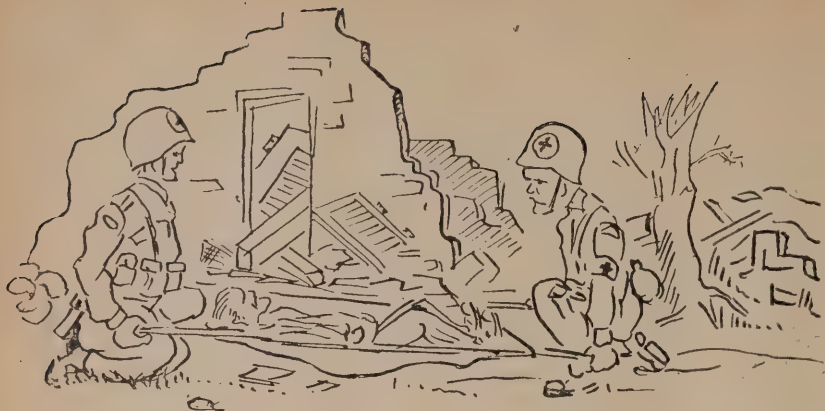
The evening of December 13, the 1st Squad, 3rd Platoon, Company B, was given the mission of laying a road block of AT mines on the only road leading out of Rollesbroich to the North. About midnight, the members of the squad, each carrying four mines, fell in behind an infantry supply squad moving down the main road leading into Rollesbroich. In order to avoid a fire-fight going on full-blast in the center of the village, the route taken was through fields in which there were many mines and booby traps. Carefully stepping over trip wires and avoiding barbed-wire entanglements, the forward C.P. of 3rd Bn., 310th Infantry was finally reached. Here the squad leader was given instructions to proceed to a point on the road several hundred yards beyond our infantry positions. Harrassed by both German and American artillery fire, the squad carried the mines to a designated spot and placed them on the road in such a pattern as to make it impossible for a tank to roll past without being blown up.

The pattern of clearing roads was the same for the next few days with the Engineers walking slowly and cautiously along the road, swinging a "vacuum cleaner" contraption in front of them listening for the buzz that would warn them of the presence of a hidden mine. At the same time, they were always alert for the scream of an incoming shell, or the whine of a sniper's bullet, which would cause them to forget mine sweeping momentarily while they sought cover in a nearby ditch. Within three days, however, the men of A Company had cleared the roads leading into Simmerath, and B Company's men had swept into Rollesbroich. With these missions completed, tanks, ambulances, and trucks could travel these roads without the danger of hitting a mine.

The types of jobs we did varied greatly among the different platoons and squads. Some men of the 2nd Platoon, B Company, checked the houses of Rollesbroich for any possible boobytraps. Other men of the 3rd Platoon, B Company, and the 1st Platoon, A Company, under cover of



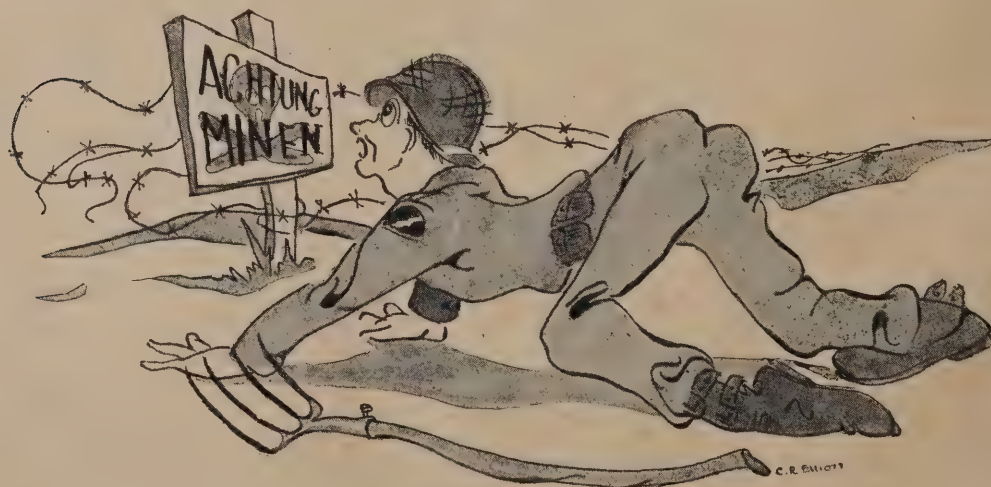




darkness, carried AT mines in front of our lines, and laid road blocks to prevent any enemy counter-attack.

On the 14 December, while the 2nd squad of the 2nd Platoon, B Company, was finishing clearing the road into Rollesbroich, Lt. Michener learned that several

men who had advanced with Company B, 310th Infantry, had walked into an antipersonnel mine field earlier in the morning, and were lying within the field with no way for the medics to remove them. After Lt. Michener had made contact with Pfc. Wallace English, the two advanced across open fields under sniper and mortar fire to the mine field that lay some 200 yards to the right of the road that Sgt. Ridz's squad was clearing. As soon as they reached the field that was marked with "Minen" signs, they began on their hands and knees to probe with their bayonets for the hidden mines. They soon started to remove small wooden boxes containing a quarter pound of picric acid powder and a firing device. These tiny boxes would blow the foot off the unwary GI who stepped on the wrong place, and they were appropriately called "Schu" mines by the Jerries. After a lane had been cleared to a wounded Infantryman, Lt. Michener got to his feet to show the litter bearers where he had cleared and stepped on a mine. The medic administered first aid—morphine and a tourniquet—and sent a man for more help. Lt. Michener, after being put on a stretcher, was carried from the field by Captain Rael and Lt. Hughes and was brought to an aid station on the hood of a jeep. Meanwhile, Pfc. English had cleared a lane to another wounded man, and while helping two medics lift the man onto a stretcher, one of them set off another mine. The explosion blew the man some ten feet backward, and the wounded man on the stretcher completely over the concertina. The other medic closest to English was





severely wounded from the blast. Although he was blinded and burned by the explosion, Pfc. English gave first aid to the stricken men about him.

For their efforts to save their comrades' lives, and the utter disregard for their own personal safety, Lt. Michener and Pfc. English were awarded Silver Stars.

After four days of some of the toughest fighting on the Western Front, the 78th Division held the western tip of Kesternich and began preparing to complete its capture. It was now the 16th of December—the date on which von Rundstedt launched his mighty counteroffensive into the Ardennes, within a few miles of our sector, in the Monschau area to the south. Because of this German drive, the Division was ordered to hold its gains at all costs, and to prepare adequate defenses.

This immediately became a job for the engineers. To prevent any sudden breakthrough into our lines, we began without delay to stretch concertina wire and set trip flares in front of all our infantry positions. Our next task was to lay a continuous belt of anti-tank mines to impede any German armored thrust against the Division. In addition to burying the AT mines by the thousands, anti-personnel mines were strewn along the front to give added protection against enemy infantry.

"We are expecting a possible armored attack through Kesternich. Call Captain Moran and ask him how soon his Engineers can cover our left flank with AT mines", said Colonel Ondrick to his Engineer liaison man.

Lt. James Thorington, leader of the 1st Platoon, A Company, reconnoitered the area, ordered five truckloads of mines delivered under cover of darkness to the schoolhouse in Simmerath. The mines were to be shuttled forward to the 309th's A Company C.P. by jeep, and carried by hand out into No-Mans land, along the left flank of Kesternich.

S/Sgt. Gus Schmidt had his platoon, plus Sgt. Francis Skelly's squad from the third platoon. They were to start from the western end of Kesternich, and proceed along the left side, paralleling the forward lines, to the eastern end of town. S/Sgt. Minotte, with his 2nd Platoon, was to begin near Rollesbroich and work south until he tied in with Sgt. Schmidt's detail. Foxhole doughs were warned not to fire at moving targets ahead of their lines that night, and soon after 2300, on the 19th of December, the company of Engineers set out.

"Jerry is sitting over on that hill, looking down your throats, so don't talk, keep as close to the ground as possible, and don't bang those damn mines together," Sgt. Schmidt reminded his men just before they moved out.

Tense moments occurred when the Jerries, suspecting that something was up, began sporadically shelling the town behind the men laying mines.

"What's wrong with those Heinies?", whispered Pvt. John Welch, "Don't they know how to shoot? One notch down on that barrel, and we're all done."



"Don't worry about a thing", consoled Cpl. Leo Larrabee, "If they hit this pile of mines, it'll look like the Grand Canyon around here—you'll never remember it."

Operations halted when Sgt. Art Carlberg, 2nd Squad, 1st Platoon, in the initial laying party ran into unexpected German concertina, with flares and booby traps attached. Men dispersed in excavations made for Jerry artillery and breathlessly waited for someone to trip a flare.

"If one of those goes up, they can't miss us", breathed Pvt. Divirgilio, as he huddled the snow, seeking concealment.

A short recon by Cpl. Spellings, and Pfc. Ted Grzybala, showed an area free from explosives, and the concertina was gapped. A guide at the gap kept the mine carriers from walking into the wire.

It was nearly 0500 the next morning when the two parties met, and tied in their night's work. Over 1000 mines had been laid, and the weary group hastily set off for Simmerath, feeling certain that no enemy tanks would penetrate the Division's defenses.

When these defensive measures were completed along the front lines, secondary positions were started; we worked hard, until it seemed each day became a repetition of the preceeding one. Sgt. Skelley and Cpl. John Welch, of A Company, found a little diversion by volunteering to accompany the men of the 2nd Ranger Battalion on some nightly patrols against pillboxes.

On high ground, at the edge of the road leading into Paustenbach, was a high steel tower. Jerry had observation on the top of the tower, and very successfully zeroed in on the road, running beneath it. Intermittent shelling made it quite costly to use the road for supplies or troop movements.

December 17th, Sgt. Elmer Nutzman was ordered to take a crew out of the third platoon, A Company, and blow the tower. Cpl. Walt Spatta, Pfc. William Sutton, and Pfc. Saur were chosen to help on the detail, and since a vehicle on the road would draw fire, they rigged up a Jerry demolition cart so it could be pulled by hand, and loaded it up with explosives.

Halfway up over the bare hill, leading to the tower, the detail was caught by unmerciful artillery fire, and Pfc. Saur and Sutton were killed. When the shelling subsided, Sgt. Nutzman took the fuse-lighters and caps from Sutton's shirt pocket and he and Cpl. Spatta continued on up

the hill, realizing that they were under enemy observation, to finish their task. They encountered more shelling, but finally succeeded in toppling the tower and returned to report what had happened. Sgt. Nutzman was awarded the Silver Star for his exceptional gallantry in action.





Chow and letters from home do more to boost the moral of the front-line soldier than any other factor. During the cold and weary days when A Company was operating out of Simmerath, and in the Hürtgen Forest, both these services were performed by the mess sergeant, S/Sgt. John Seitz.

Before daylight in the mornings, and as soon as it became dark at night, Sgt. Seitz would run the gauntlet of intermittent shelling to reach the platoon C.P.'s, which were only a few hundred yards from the front. Leaving the remainder of his personnel in the comparative safety of the rear area, he would load a weapons carrier with Marmite cans of culinary concoctions, and move forward to feed his men on schedule.

On one occasion, a shell landed so close to the truck that Seitz was bounced out into a ditch, and his driver was slightly wounded. Brushing himself off, and flinging a few fitting epithets toward the Jerry artillerymen, he climbed back into the truck and continued the trip. The driver was evacuated, but Seitz was only shaken up a bit. As a result of his tenacity and courage, he became known to his men as "Fearless John".

In recognition of his undying devotion to his men, in the face of any odds, Sgt. Seitz was awarded the Bronze Star.

Patches of snow lay on the fields and hills around Lammersdorf, and the feeble rays of the sun tried vainly to warm us as we worked in the bitter cold. It was the 25th, but somehow it didn't seem like Christmas. Maybe it was because our thoughts were on what lay ahead. We could look towards the East at the high hills rising on either side of the Roer, and see the enemy's pillboxes and the heavily wooded country he was defending; but we couldn't know what lay in wait for us before we reached the plains leading to the Rhine.

Even though we were very busy, we did have some spare time. We were pleasantly surprised one day when some of us were allowed to crowd into trucks and ride to Eupen for showers. This was the first time we had been able to take showers since we had left Belgium.

War continued all about us, however, and we were soon back to work again. The Division's defenses had to be strengthened, and to accomplish this, the engineers were ordered to blow all pillboxes behind our lines, and those that we could possibly get to forward of the lines.

On January 3rd the infantry near Bickerath moved up to take pill box Nr. 24 so the Engineers could plant their demolitions and blow it. One of the men in the infantry assault squad was to blow a hole in the steel turret of the box but he couldn't get the fuze lighter on his charge to work so Pvt B W Chalmers, Jr of Company C Engineers was sent up to try. He went up to the box under the cover of machine gun fire from the supporting tanks and set off his charge. All it did was make a dent in the turret. But while he was up there, he discovered that two of the embrasure doors had been blown off by fire from the tank's big guns. By now it was apparent that nothing but a large assault would crack the box.



The next day, large preparations were made to assault box No. 24 and its neighbor, No. 25, a troop shelter. The Engineers carried 2000 lbs. of TNT to the Infantry platoon command post just a few hundred yards from No. 24. They were to have the help of a tankdozer this time and the plan was, that while the assault team stormed one door of the box, the tankdozer would seal the other.

Lt. Siegele, leader of Company C's 1st platoon, organized the assault team, placing Engineer Sgt. Lawrence L. Higgins in charge, the two Engineer demolition men were Sgt. Paul W. Burdick and Pfc. James T. Davis, the rest of the team was from the infantry; a BAR man, a bazooka team, two men with a flame thrower and a submachine gunner. While approaching the pill box, Davis was wounded but insisted on going forward with the team. The usual grenade screen was missing from the doors of this box so the bazooka was discarded. They threw a couple of hand grenades down the stairs into the box and the submachine gunner followed, firing as he went, when they reached the bottom, flames shot up around their knees and they hastily withdrew but when nothing more happened, the engineers raced back down and planted their charges against the steel doors.

The explosion tore off the doors and shattered the concrete around them. Two dazed and battered Krauts staggered out, the only survivors of the concussion inside the box.

Meanwhile, the dozer driver was busy taking care of his part of the deal, the slippery snow and the deep hole at the entrance of the pill box making things tough for him. On the third cut his tank became immovably stuck; he couldn't even make it wiggle. He would have to leave his tank and walk back but figured on doing as much damage as he could before leaving. With the 75mm. gun mounted on the tank, he fired all his 70 rounds of ammunition in through the doors of the box.

The men assaulting box No. 25 moved into position with their supporting tank. The infantry took cover in the numerous shell holes around the box, while the Engineer went up to place his charge. The demolition man on this operation was Cpl. Richard R. Teaford and his task was to blow a hole in the side of the box so he could drop in hand grenades to persuade the Krauts to come out. He got up to the door but couldn't find a suitable spot to place his charge so he ran around to the other side of the box and set the charge in the embrasure.

After all these explosions, mortar fire came in thick and fast and anywhere near a pill box wasn't the safest place to be. A shell splinter wounded Teaford severely, and he had to be evacuated. The men withdrew but the shells kept coming in, and it was impossible for the mop-up squad to move up and finish taking the boxes.

All this time, other Engineers had been carrying demolitions up to the troop shelter in hopes of using it to blow the boxes after they were captured, but there was always harrassing artillery fire and the snipers to worry about. Funny thing about those snipers; if a man ran into the



open, the sniper would fire, but if he just stood still and looked around, even in the open, the sniper would stay quiet.

That was the day Pfc. Clarence T. Jack got tired of being shot at and went out and killed one of the snipers.

Cpl. Charlie F. Sisk was sent back to the Infantry command post and told to stay there. There were a lot of wounded doughboys around and the front line medics needed stretchers. Sisk didn't like the idea of taking a back seat in the action so he brought up the needed stretchers as an excuse to be with his buddies again.

Pfc. John J. Coyle, the Engineer medic, was up on the road leading to the Kraut box so he could be on hand in case one of his Engineers were wounded. But during one of the many barrages a doughboy was hit and Coyle went to give him aid. Doc was squatting on the ground just outside the dough boy's foxhole when the next barrage came in and a close shell killed the doughboy and severely wounded Doc in the leg.

When the Engineers in the troop shelter heard of this, they all wanted to go to their medic's aid. Lt. Siegele and T/4 Frank Momot tried to get to him but a Kraut machine gun was firing through a break in the hedge row, and their artillery was trying to knock out one of our tanks so the men were forced to turn back. Later, when the firing quited down, the whole engineer group took a stretcher mounted on skis up to the foxhole and evacuated Coyle.

Still another Engineer was wounded in this action Pvt. Charles Pistrong had been sitting in a hole along the lane leading to the box, waiting for the assault team to return, so he could carry up demolitions and blow the box. He caught a sniper's bullet in the hand and had to be evacuated.

The men on the assault team received Bronze Star medals and Doc Coyle received the Distinguished Service Cross medal for extraordinary heroism against the enemy.

To complete our defensive preparations, we prepared bridges for demolition, placed hundreds of pounds of TNT in captured pillboxes and blew them, blasted craters in some roads and prepared others with demolition, cut trees and felled them across the roads as abatis and dug machine gun and mortar emplacements. We also cleared trees and other obstacles which would interfere with the field of fire of proposed machine-gun positions, and spread triple concertina wire throughout the entire Division area.

Make it impossible for the Germans to break through! That was the Engineer's mission. One very effective means would be to blow holes in all the good roads along their line of advance, large holes, and plenty of them. But demolitions must be dug in and buried, and it was winter, and the ground was frozen. Digging wasn't going to be easy, and the job had to be done quickly. Here and there the Krauts had helped us. They had erected steel rail tank-barriers at points where the main roads crossed the Siegfried Line, and the holes left when the rails were drawn out were ideal spots to tamp a charge. In a few spots there were handy



culverts, but for the most part the holes had to be dug right down through the solid surface of the road. We tried shaped charges and that wasn't too good either. The air compressor was the answer. With the jackhammer, we could dig all the holes we wanted in no time at all.

So it was early in January that C Company's air compressor was sitting on a little rise in the road just outside of Paustenbach. Pfc. Henry W. Green was our air compressor operator, and that morning Pfc. Harold D. Hartman was helping him. Most of the 1st Platoon's 2nd Squad was out there too, some wielding post hole diggers, and some acting as security guard. As a rule, the Army doesn't make it a practice to get its heavy equipment so near the front because if it is knocked out, it is extremely difficult to replace. Then there was the thought that a piece of machinery like an air compressor makes so much noise it is quite apt to draw artillery fire. But the demolition had to be put in and sure enough, the Kraut artillery opened up! Pvt. William J. Sullivan was acting as security guard that morning and was unlucky enough to be near a shell when it landed in a row of concertina wire stretched out near his post. He was severely wounded in the neck and legs.

Work was resumed, after the barrage subsided, and within an hour the road had been properly prepared for cratering.

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In the light of all these preparations, Battalion assured Division that Von Rundstedt would have a very difficult time breaking through our sector.

Division at this time had set up a rest center in Raeren, Belgium, at a school building, and every day some men were sent there on a 24-hour pass. It was good to get away from the strain of the front lines although occasionally German planes would come over and strafe the town. That didn't keep us from enjoying the Rest Center's facilities, the movies, the Red Cross girls and their coffee and doughnuts, and just the chance to relax.

During this period, with its C. P. in Rötgen, H & S Company had efficiently fulfilled their duties of keeping supplies moving, and had even established a rest center for the Battalion with plenty of doughnuts and coffee, and a chance to brush up on old acquaintances in other companies. The men on line received extra clothes for the cold weather, with socks and gloves in abundance. Linemen appreciated an occasional chance to see the movies and to get their clothes laundered.

S-2 and S-3 were extremely busy with the Division's situation maps, daily reconnaissances, mine reports, and defense strategy. The S-4 section is to be commended for promptly supplying the line companies with all needed explosives. Some of the material handled during this period was 51,200 pounds of TNT blocks, 11,155 blasting caps, 31,600 feet of detonating core, 19,000 AT mines, 2,000 AP mines, etc.





The Medical Detachment rendered invaluable service in prompt evacuations and care for the wounded. Captain "Doc" Tedesco used every opportunity to make routine physical check-ups on the entire battalion. The true value of his work can be judged by the maintenance of the fighting strength of the battalion throughout the winter months.

Captain Goldstein seemed untiring in his efforts to keep the battalion's teeth in shape. His C. P. in Rötgen, and later in battle-scarred Kesternich, was continually bustling with activity.

For the next few weeks we had a partial break. The reinforcements who had joined the Battalion were attending refresher classes in all phases of engineering while the rest of us repaired the roads in the Division area. It was relatively quiet, but of course we still had the German artillery shells coming in close to the houses in which we lived. And we used to listen every night for the droning motors of the German plane, known to us as "Bedcheck Charlie". We heard "Berlin Sally" nightly over our radios, and picked up the propaganda leaflets of "Sam Levi" consorting with our wives and sweethearts at home. Nevertheless, we appreciated those nights of uninterrupted sleep, when we weren't pulled out of a warm sack to go to the front on some mission.

On the 10 January, 1945, the 309th Infantry, situated north of Lammersdorf, jumped off to secure some high ground, and to eliminate some key pillboxes, thus advancing our lines several hundred yards. Company A assisted them in assaulting the pillboxes and destroying them completely, so as to prevent their use in case the enemy re-took the ground in a counter-attack.

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In the early morning hours of 27 January, 1945, an assault team from Fox Company of the 309th Infantry Regiment moved forward to eliminate one of a number of pillboxes in a heavily defended sector of the Siegfried Line. This team was composed of ten Infantrymen and two engineers from Company A, 1st platoon, who were assigned as demolition men. The group had been thoroughly oriented as to the task ahead, and now they would put their training to practical use.

Emerging from the forest into the first gray light of dawn, the attacking



force encountered an intense mortar barrage and sporadic bursts of machine-gun fire, forcing them to seek cover. The main body of Fox Company, supporting the assault team, deployed and fired at the Germans from a deserted trench.

After a delay of almost five hours, the two engineers rushed forward to place a shape charge in each entrance to the pillbox. The infantrymen covered their advance by a protective screen of automatic rifle fire. Setting each charge in position to do the greatest damage, the engineers withdrew to await the explosion. As the charges detonated, smoke and flame poured from every firing embrasure of the pillbox.

Waiting to see whether there would be any further opposition from this pillbox, the assault squad kept watching it for a short while. Then, since there was no further activity noticeable, the men cautiously approached and entered the pillbox. Finding all the Germans within either dead or wounded, the squad immediately proceeded to prepare the steel and concrete fortress for demolition. Placing two hundred pounds of TNT in each of the two rooms, and lighting the time fuse, the men withdrew to cover and soon heard the explosion which completely destroyed the pillbox.

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The "Bulge" was being rapidly pushed back, toward the middle of January, by the massed power of the Allied ground and air forces, and we began to ready ourselves to resume the offensive.

Since knee-deep snow covered the earth and the wind had piled up drifts, we were compelled to devise new methods for performing our work. For instance, we built sleds which we and the infantry used to move heavy loads over the snow. Snow-capes were issued to the men and many of us painted our rifles white. Vehicles which were used close to the front were also given camouflage coatings of white-wash. These measures were all helpful in reducing the disadvantages of the winter weather, which was quite severe, and which the Germans had hoped would prevent our further advance.

While our front was stabilized, we took advantage of the opportunity to brush up on our skill with various weapons, such as the bazooka and rifle grenade-launcher, giving us a keener sense of their effectiveness. Demolitions were prepared so they could be used at a moment's notice. We developed new techniques, such as placing shape charges on sleds, with long handles attached, which allowed a man to slip up and set the charge against the door of a pillbox without getting too close to the German guns inside.

By the end of January, the Bulge ceased to exist, for von Rundstedt and his last great effort had failed. The time was right for the 78th to strike, and to resume the task of capturing the dam. Under an umbrella of shells from guns of Division and Corps Artillery, the 310th and 311th Regiments "jumped off" to the south and east of Simmerath, while the 309th held the northern flank. With the help of strong supporting armor,



the operation proceeded swiftly and smoothly, and within a few hours the towns of Konzen, Am Gericht, Huppenbroich, Eicherscheid, Imgenbroich and Hammer had fallen. As a rule, the enemy surrendered after a brief flurry of fighting, running from fortified positions and pillboxes with their hands over their heads. At Kesternich, however, the fighting was from house to house, and the town resisted capture by 311th Infantry until 2 February.

B Company was in direct support of the 310 Regiment. The 2nd Platoon breached gaps through our own mine fields just outside of Simmerath, so that tanks could move through to the attack, and cleared the road south from Simmerath into Eicherscheid and Hammer. Advancing with the infantry into the attack, other men of the 3rd platoon carried 40 pounds of TNT on their backs—to be used in blowing any pillboxes that resisted capture. Others set about clearing the roads into Konzen and Am Gericht, but found the snow covered roads impassable to all vehicles except the caterpillar-tracked Weasel. The work of the 1st platoon was almost the same as other platoons. These men cleared the road south of Am Gericht to Imgenbroich and destroyed pillboxes that had been captured by the infantry.

"A" Company's mission was to blow all pillboxes that had been neutralized, and a Weasel had been issued to each platoon to assist in hauling demolitions over the snow-laden fields. Most boxes took between 800 and 1000 pounds of demolition, but there were a few, central control points that were larger. Some of these took as much as 1500 pounds. Up and down the roads, and across the fields, the weasels sped, the back ends filled with explosives and whitecoated engineers draped around every possible spot for riding.

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Coming up over a little rise, heading for a pillbox, Lieutenant Thorington, 1st platoon, A Company, with Sgt. Layne and his first squad, noticed two Jerries crouched down in a dugout position. He called for his driver, Pfc. Gilley, to stop. Sgt. Layne, Cpl. Dally, Pfc. L. Smith, Pfc. Eckroat bounced off the weasel, and headed for the Krauts with their M-1's readied.

"I noticed a P-38 on one of them, and rushed up to claim it, when the barrel of an '88" came in view," says Sgt. Layne.

Further investigation showed that the artillery piece was pointing down the road they had just used, and was now trained directly at the pile of demolition in the back of the weasel.

"Guess those Jerries were just too cold to shoot," says Pfc. Eckroat—"They could easily have made mince-meat out of the whole crew."

"Sgt. Ferrell, round up your men—number 121, as Y-10 has been captured, and must be blown." It was Lieutenant Repinsky, 3rd Platoon, A Company, talking to his 2nd Squad leader. The code numbers indicated a pillbox, and its location—just off the road out of Simmerath.



Everyone rode the demo-loaded weasels with their fingers crossed those days, hoping that the wide tracks and the layer of snow would provide enough cushion not to set off the mines we all knew were laying there.

Sgt. Ferrell was driving, Pvts. Bruce Wilson and Stanley Schermer clung to the motor cowling, and Pvts. Sorkowitz, Woolf, Ptak, and Huff sat on the boxes of demolition. The crew had almost reached the pillbox when the front end of the weasel rose in the air from crossing a slight mound, and dropped suddenly as the center of gravity shifted. The sudden impact exploded a Riegel under the right track, and the concussion hurled the riders out into the snow.

All the occupants were seriously wounded, and evacuated, except Sgt. Ferrell, who miraculously escaped with only a good bruising and shaking-up. Luckily enough, though, the blast didn't set off the load of demolition they were hauling.

Sgt. Ferrell later took another crew up and finished the job of destroying the pillbox.

In the seven-day period, ending 7 February, A Company blew a total of 90 pillboxes, using 60,660 pound of demolitions. Newsreels of the Battalion's work appeared on the screen of theaters in the States and in London; "Combat Diary" also featured the 303rd in one of its "Salutes to the Armed Forces". With all these boxes destroyed, the backbone of the Siegfried line had been broken.

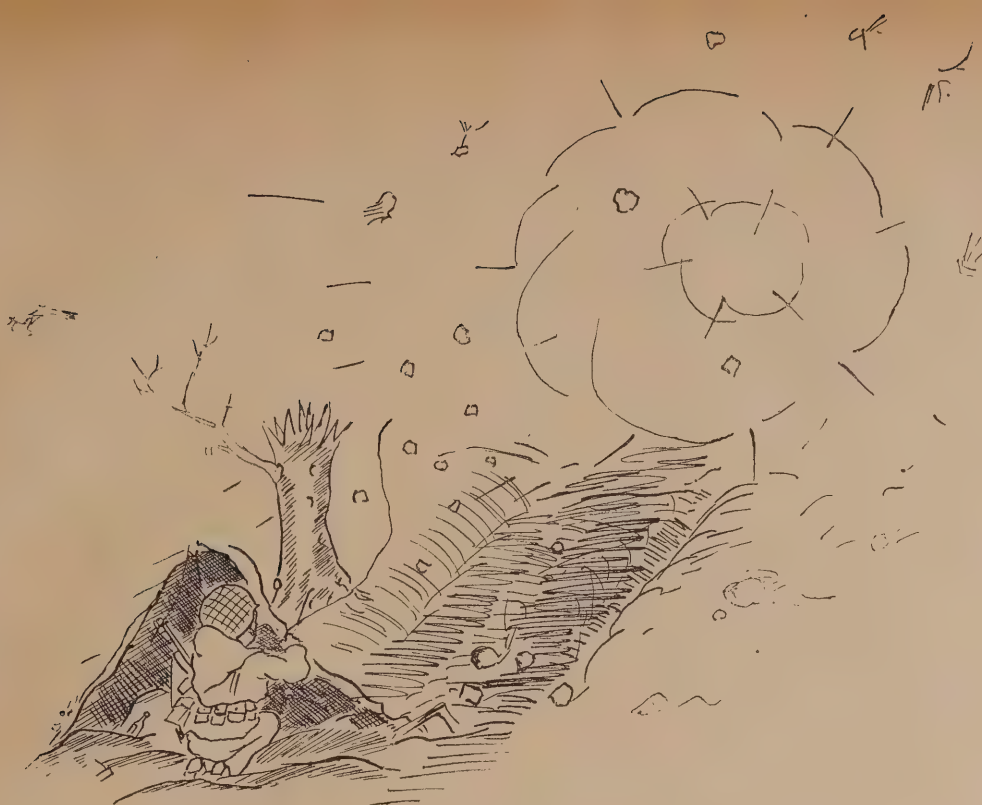
The success of this operation brought a citation to General Parker, and he in turn, praised the 303rd Engineers with Bronze Stars for the Company Commanders and the Platoon Leaders.

After the seizure of Dedenborn and Ruhrberg, our southern flank was secure. Now the Division turned northeast toward formidable Schmidt, often referred to as the "anchor" of the Siegfried Line. Strongly fortified Schmidt, blocking the way to the Schwammenauel Dam, lay on high ground just three miles north of Ruhrberg.

The military road from Rollesbroich to the German Barracks was to be used for evacuating wounded, when the big drive on Schmidt began. Mines, craters, and road blocks littered the road, and the 2nd Platoon, A Company set out 4 February to open it up. Starting at the small dam just out of Rollesbroich, Lieutenant Connor began checking the road, when he stepped on a Schu mine and became a serious casualty. In attempting to reach him, Sgt. Guinn stepped on a booby-trapped Riegel that severely wounded him. The remainder of the platoon worked all afternoon, in an attempt to reach the wounded men, and that evening, Pvts. W. J. Williams, Hogsett, and Murray took the platoon weasel up to evacuate them. In the dark, Williams turned in order to by-pass a crater in the road, and struck a Riegel. The blast turned the weasel completely over, and left three more casualties.

When the attack against Schmidt got under way on the 5 February, the 311 Infantry pushed straight north from Ruhrberg, the 310 Infantry





struck northeast from Simmerath, and the 309 Infantry slugged its way through the woods and hills in the area south of Schmidt, to cover the main attack of the Division.

Woffelsbach, Steckenborn, and Strauch, all fortified to protect the approaches to Schmidt, were captured by dark, 5 February. The enemy counter-attacked regularly, but these attacks were beaten off without slowing the advance of the push. The area was heavily mined. As far as the eye could see there stretched long rows of Riegel, Teller and Box mines. Schu mines and other anti-personnel mines also made the going rough. Numerous pillboxes barred the way to the men climbing the wooded hills, and crawling up the deep ravines.

On 7 February, 1945, about 0900, the 3rd Battalion of the 310th Infantry, with the support of Sherman Tanks and Tank Destroyers, was advancing up the road to Schmidt from Strauch.

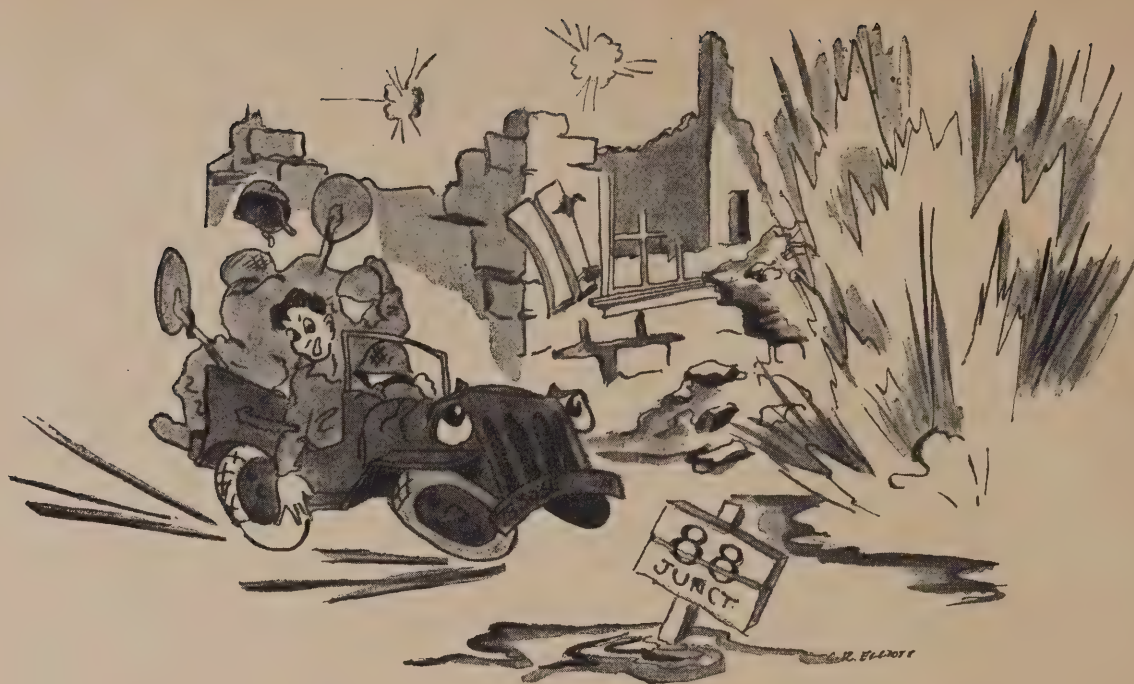
Company "K" was in the point, with the 3rd Squad, 3rd Platoon of B Company, 303rd Engineer Battalion, attached. Members of the squad were, Sgt. Rhodes, T/4 Kewatt, T/5 Grace, Pfc. Porter, Pfc. Sinett, and Pvt. Falk.

Coming out into the open, heavily-defended terrain before Schmidt, after taking a wooded area on both sides of the highway, K Company ran into three pillboxes which had to be neutralized before the attack could continue.

This was a job for the armor, but a dense minefield blocked the road, and extended for 100 yards across clearings to the thickly wooded areas, which were impassable on both sides.

The engineer squad was called on to gap the minefield so the tanks could get through and assault the pillboxes. Since it was necessary to clear the lane speedily so that our troops could move ahead to Schmidt, the engineers proceeded to lift the mines by hand. T/4 Kewatt noticed





that some of the mines were boobytrapped, so a rope was attached to a few at a time and they were pulled out from a safer distance. Of the first six pulled, three mines exploded.

While exposed to intense artillery, mortar and machine-gun fire, the squad pulled out 60 Teller mines, and the tanks moved through the gap. Pvt. Falk was hit by shell fragments and was evacuated during this mission, and was later awarded the Silver Star. Bronze Stars were awarded to the other members of the squad.

On the 8th of February the 310th Infantry plunged into the town of Schmidt. Here was some of the toughest fighting on the Western Front. The Germans had zeroed in on the town, and the explosion of the "88's" constantly pounded the ears of the men as they tried to escape the devastating hail of jagged metal. There were no houses that had remained unscathed through the heavy shelling. Engineers accompanying the 310th Infantry said that German "Burp-gun" fire was the heaviest they had encountered. By the end of that day, remnants of six enemy divisions had fallen or fled before the onslaught of the 78th, 2500 prisoners had been captured, and 16 towns had fallen during the eight-day period.

The attack was going full blast. Captain Rael told us the situation and boosted us up on the tanks. Our job was to use Bangalore torpedoes to blow any mines that might hinder the advance of the tanks. For the first hundred yards or so, things went fairly well, when suddenly the "Burp-guns" opened up from three sides. When the German bullets started ricocheting off the sides of the tanks, we jumped down from the tanks and continued on foot. Moving to the center of town, we directed the tanks off the road on to an open field. By doing this, we avoided the danger of mines on the road. One of the tanks, spotting a house containing a Jerry machine-gun, started drawing closer for a direct shot. Pfc. William Carstensen and Cpl. Steve Honkoski mounted the tank, but before they



could halt its advance, it had turned on to the road and immediately struck a mine. Although the two engineers were stunned by the explosion, they escaped without serious injury. Tankers inside the tanks were unable to locate the position of the German machine-gunners, so whenever we saw the flash, or smoke of a gun, we directed the tank to fire on the house it came from. After knocking out



a half-dozen machine-gun nests in these houses, the tanks moved ahead to the brow of the hill, where we could see across the hills along the Roer River. But the Jerries could also see us; almost at once they began shelling the area around us. During the barrage, Sgt. Roy Erickson, Pfc. John Beeks, and Pfc. William Morrissey found shelter in a nearby cellar, but discovered the Germans were hitting the rubble overhead regularly. Pfc. Richard Pretzer and Pfc. Stephen Wachenfeld also found shelter in the rubble of a house. When a shell later hit the roof, Pretzer was literally caught with his pants down and had to seek other shelter quickly in that condition. The proximity of the fighting led to much confusion, and the Germans repeatedly laid down barrages on their own positions. Our guns did better, but even they were landing some on our side of the narrow streets occasionally. After about four hours the barrage lifted, replacements were rushed up, and the attack continued through the town. Since the tanks were temporarily inactive, the engineers started housecleaning—looking for snipers. Only one was taken, and he was turned in for questioning concerning the minefields between Schmidt and the Dams.

Later in the day the infantry drove ahead, but as our tanks were knocked out by German anti-tank guns, there was no more work for engineers, so we retired to the forward C.P. for a much-needed rest.

While the 310th Infantry secured Schmidt, the 311th moved toward the Dam, along the north shore of the reservoir. On the afternoon of February 9th, the 309th Infantry leap-frogged over the 311th positions, and broke out of the woods at the Dam itself.

On the night of 9th February, ten men from the 1st Platoon, A Company, were attached to the 1st Battalion, 309th, in combat teams—three engineers to each infantry company—to take care of any demolition work that might confront the assault.

Cpls. Wagner and Burns, Pfc. Toth, Wilson, Dodge, Clark, Blackman, Dora, Chislow, and T/5 Duffy, were each issued three bandoliers of ammunition, and told they would be attached to the assaulting platoons of the various companies. When asked where the demolitions were that





the engineers were supposed to use, the infantry's C. O. replied, "They'll be brought up when the jeeps can get through—don't worry about a thing."

A Company 309th's mission was taking the buildings on the western tip and securing the approaches to the Dam. B Co. was to take the control buildings below the Dam, and C Company was to clear the area above the Dam.

"It was the darkest night yet, and as we came down off the hill on to the road, approaching the dam, the heavy fighting centered about the building directly in front of me, and 88's started spraying the area. I hit the ground and started firing. Someone was firing from behind me, and someone on my right—it was a wild, scary night." A ricochet grazed Wilson's right eye and cheek before the "Burp-gunner" was finally stopped.

It was a terribly confused, fearful night for everyone, and when the area was finally secured, the engineers were released and given the "bag" of prisoners to escort back to the infantry C.P.s for questioning, while the infantrymen held their positions, expecting more counter-attacks. The engineer platoon suffered four casualties that night from small arms and artillery fire.

While the 309th was engaged in clearing the area, other engineers, on reconnaissance parties, passed through and entered the Dam proper.

The Dam itself was first approached by Lieutenant Phelan and a four man patrol from C Company. Pvt. Storkel, Pfc. Fisher and Albough, and Pvt. Hart all agree with Lt. Phelan that every available enemy weapon must have been trained upon the top of the dam at 2300, February 9, when they first attempted to cross. As Lt. Phelan later said, "It was like a ten-minute artillery barrage—repeated every ten minutes; between shell explosions, the burp-gunners could be heard." The patrol returned after the first attempt because of the heavy sniper fire, only to make another try at midnight. They planned to cross on top of the dam to the spillway, and descend there to a tunnel, running through the dam—the most probable place for demolition charges. After they had raced across the 1000 feet of mounded earth, dodging sniper bullets and artillery shells, they found the spillway blown, and not accessible. Their only other means of approach was to slide down the 200 foot face to the tunnel entrance on the enemy side of the dam. Slipping into the six-foot causeway, they surprised and took prisoner six German machine-gunners and snipers. Further investigation failed to produce any explosives.



"The 22 billion gallons of water that was behind the dam caused tremendous pressure down there in the tunnel, and made breathing hard; talking was almost impossible. "We still expected to be blown to bits any moment by hidden charges," members of the patrol told reporters afterwards.

Meanwhile, another engineer reconnaissance party was led down on to the dam by S/Sgt. Ed. Naylor. Its mission was to assault the gatehouse, and, by thorough observation, determine whether the sluice-way was up or down, and whether it had been blown or not.

S/Sgt. Naylor and a bomb-disposal sergeant from Army moved in with the lead elements of the assault, which was by A Company, 309th, led by Captain Shaw. Immediately after the first wave of infantry struck, Naylor started for the gatehouse. Heavy machine-gun fire stopped them, and they dropped back to the infantry lines for support. Captain Shaw sent seven infantrymen out with them this time—one BAR-man and assistant, one bazooka-man and assistant, and three riflemen.

On this trip, they reached the gatehouse, but, when they attempted to inspect it, received fire from within.

"We returned the small arms fire," says S/Sgt. Naylor, "And blasted one bazooka round into the door. After this, the Sgt. and I were able to make our inspection."

Fifteen to twenty minutes of examination showed that the gates were up, and that some demolition work had been done on them. Water was rushing out of the dam to the valley below. The party then went on back to the C.P., and S/Sgt. Naylor reported his findings to Major Gerleman. It was then 0400—five hours after they had first gone under enemy fire.

For his cool courage under intense enemy fire, in obtaining the invaluable information so crucial at that moment, S/Sgt. Naylor was awarded the Bronze Star.

When the 78th Division reported the objective area seized from the enemy on the morning of 10 February, the 303rd Engineers were able to send this message: "The great dam that has so long impeded Allied offensives on the Western Front, has not, and will not, be blown—the offensive may proceed on schedule."

## T H E R O E R

After the capture of the Dam, the engineers gave classes to the infantry in the use of assault boats, which would be used in the event of a river crossing. Probing enemy defenses, numerous infantry patrols were ferried across the Roer by the engineers.

The 310th Infantry, preparing for an early crossing of the flooded Roer, wanted a German prisoner for interrogation. T/4 Gerald Kewatt and Pfc. Allen Porter of B Company volunteered to take an infantry patrol on this mission.



It was dark, that night of 20th February, when eight infantrymen and the two engineers left the O.P., carrying two inflated rubber reconnaissance boats. Moving out at 2200, they had to cross about 500 yards of flat bottom land before they reached the banks of the swollen river. Four infantrymen and one engineer were assigned to a boat. Since the river was still at flood stage, the current was fast, and the light boat was tossed around in the swirling water. It wasn't much more than 25 yards to the opposite bank, but the boats were swept about 100 yards downstream before they were paddled to shore. While the engineers beached the boats, the infantrymen immediately set out on their task.

Shortly, several infantrymen returned and asked for an engineer to come along and check what appeared to be a minefield. Porter went ahead, and he and two infantrymen had just crossed the railroad tracks, which were about 75 yards from the river, when a German patrol of platoon size approached in a column of files, from the left. In the blackness of the night, the Germans were unaware of the presence of the American soldiers, and it wasn't until they had come almost within reaching distance, that the Americans rose suddenly and demanded their surrender. The Krauts were completely surprised and some raised their hands, but their leader reached for his pistol. One of the infantrymen immediately fired, and killed him. In the resulting confusion, shots were fired by both sides, and then a Kraut flare burst overhead.

Outnumbered, and in danger of being cut off from their boats the American patrol managed to withdraw, and re-crossed the Roer, without casualties.

The 2nd Platoon of A Company was given the job of making hourly reports on the water level in the reservoir and on the height of the river. They established an O.P. on the river banks, complete with rubber recon boats, tapes, and measuring sticks. It was a nerve-wracking, tedious task, for the positions were under direct enemy observation, and the men could move about only at night. They were under constant shelling, and if someone grew careless and stuck his head a little too high in the day-time, machine-gun fire cut across the river into their positions. The reports came in, though, affording a close check on the everchanging current of the river. The information was vitally important, for when the river subsided sufficiently, the Allied offensive was to cross and continue its attack on Germany.

As it became apparent that we could soon cross the Roer, Division asked the engineers to construct a road into Blens, so that the movement of troops and materials would not be compelled to use the main highway, which was under constant shelling. The melting snow, and occasional





rainfall had left the fields and woods a sea of boggy mud, and it was impossible to build a two-lane road through the firebreaks in the forest. Most of the trucks in the battalion were kept busy hauling the rubble of Schmidt to the new road. Corduroy was built, and like the rocks, was soon buried beneath several feet of mud. Finally, after tons of rock and thousands of feet of timber had been used, a fairly solid foundation was established, and the road was passable. A fitting name was selected and a sign posted—"8-Ball Highway"—constructed by 303rd Engineer (C) Battalion.

Meanwhile, the 9th Infantry Division established a bridgehead just north of our sector, thus opening the way for our attack across the Roer.

At 1000 on the morning of the 1st of March, Lieutenant Repinsky led his 3rd Platoon, A Company, into Blens, with equipment to construct a foot-bridge over the Roer River. It was cold, the current was swift and swollen, and the little town of Blens was practically deserted that morning as Lt. "Rip" divided his platoon into work details and started his bridge.

Cpl. John Welch, Sgt. Elmer Nutzman, T/5 Alfred Schettle, T/4 Seymour Hart, and Pfc. Haney were to work on the outer end of the bridge, as it was assembled and pushed out into the water. The five men spent the entire afternoon in the water, and practically had to crack the ice off their clothes to get them off that evening.

If it hadn't been for Huge Sgt. Nutzman out there in the water, we never would have gotten the bridge in," says Cpl. Welch. "He was the only one who was heavy enough to stand in the swift current—it kept washing my feet from under me, and I had to hang on to the bridge for support. Sgt. Nutzman was handling those big H-frames by himself, and really put in a good day of work."

T/5 Joe Kachur, T/5 Howard Anderson, Pfc. Maurice Acampora, and Pfc. Russell Mann made up carrying crews that assembled the bridge on the bank and pushed it out into the water. The area was shelled constantly, for there were still observers in the hills on the opposite bank, despite continued shelling by our own artillery.

Finally, about 1700, the bridge was completed; steps were cut in the bank to make approaching in the dark easier, and the five men who had spent the day in the water retired to the C.P. to dry out. The rest of the platoon was on guard most of the night—directing the infantrymen to, and across the bridge. Before daylight the entire 309th Regiment and elements of the 310th had crossed the bridge—the Roer River, which had held up the advance on the Western Front for so long, had been crossed, and without the great number of casualties that usually accompany a river crossing.







# RHINELAND TO THE RUHR POCKET

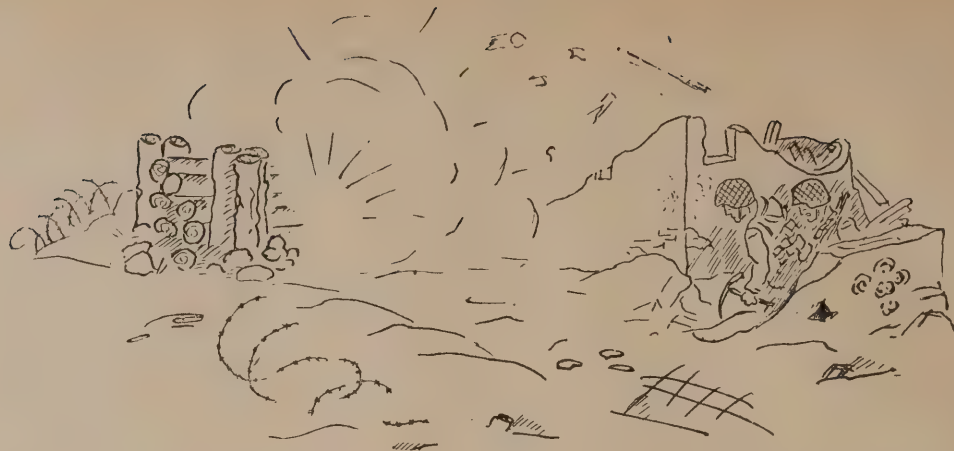
On March 3, 1945, the 78th Division began its historic race to the Rhine River, 35 miles away. On the Rhineland plains, the hastily constructed entrenchments were the most formidable defenses the Germans had to offer. The huge mine fields and concrete bunkers of the Siegfried Line were but an unpleasant memory. Compared to the yard by yard fighting for the Schwammenauel, the Rhineland campaign was to be a high-powered plunge to the last major natural barrier before Berlin—the Rhine River.

The Germans now resorted to delaying tactics, placing log barricades on the approaches to towns, blowing craters in the roads, and demolishing bridges. Defending each town as long as possible, those Germans who were not captured retreated to the next town and continued the fight. But sometimes towns were surrendered without a struggle; the Bürgermeister would have white flags displayed from each building. We moved ahead constantly, sleeping in a town for a night, then rushing eastward to catch up with front lines. In order to keep supply routes open, we were frequently busy repairing roads.

During the drive from the Roer to the Rhine, a report came in that the enemy had placed demolitions on a bridge across the Erft Canal. The destruction of such a prize had to be prevented if possible so Pfc. Alfred A. Gray and Pfc. Charles F. Shepherd were appointed to ride the tanks in a race to get to the bridge and cut the wires before it could be blown. Pfc. Kurt Storkel and Pvt. James L. Suddath rode the lead tank to inspect the road for mines. They had to go through Billig which was supposedly taken, but when they entered the town they were fired on. The dough-boys left the tanks and deployed to fight. The Engineers stuck to the tanks and rolled right down the main street of town. There was little time, but still enough. Our men were only a few hundred yards from the bridge when the Krauts began one of their terrific mortar barrages, and with shells flying around, the top of a tank is a very unsafe place to be. The engineers decided to part company with their tanks but before Gray could jump down, a shell came in and hit the turret of the tank he was riding and sent a splinter through his arm. During the next few minutes the Germans set off their demolitions and presented the engineers with another and tougher problem, that of crossing the canal without a bridge.

In eight days the 309th and 311th Infantry regiments advanced 35 miles, and captured more than 1500 prisoners and 47 towns. More than 87 square miles of German ground was cleared. The German army west of the Rhine ceased to exist. Meanwhile, the 310th, working with the 9th Armored Division, had been motorized for most of its advance to the Rhine. Mounted on open-top trucks and preceded by tanks, the 310th troops captured many German towns without even dismounting. By





March 7th, the 310th had seized more than 2300 prisoners and 35 towns, including Euskirchen, Rheinbach and Bad Neuenahr.

The 1st Battalion of the 310th was the first unit to receive word of the seizure of the Ludendorff Railway Bridge, spanning the Rhine. They were the first soldiers of an American Infantry Division to cross the Rhine. A water-point was established shortly thereafter by H & S at Erpel, and soon the entire Battalion poured across into the few towns already taken in the bridgehead. We were kept busy setting AT mine road blocks to help prevent any German counter-thrust.

The infantry had grabbed a foothold on the east bank of the Rhine and now the task was to expand its bridgehead. From the Roer to the Rhine not too many mines had been found but for a long time the enemy had been preparing for our inevitable assault on the eastern side of the river. There were no more extensive minefields as there had been in the Siegfried Line but we now found numerous road blocks and log barriers thrown up across the main routes of advance.

It was near Honnef that Sgt. James C. Vernon, Pfc. Warren K. Kilpatrick and Pfc. Vernon D. Anderson found one of these barriers and proceeded to remove it. After thoroughly searching the ground for mines, they began lifting the logs and laying them beside the road out of the way. A hidden mine exploded and wounded all three men. The wily enemy had placed a mine in the barrier itself and no amount of searching would ever have found it.

As the Division moved north to enlarge the bridgehead along the east bank of the Rhine, the towns of Linz, Dattenberg, Erpel, Honnef, and Königswinter, fell to our troops.

The Remagen Bridgehead was slowly, but surely expanding—enough so that reinforcements could be sent across the river and not be jammed into one small town. C Company, after spending the first night across the Rhine at Erpel, moved down to a larger town, Unkel. Here the company set up quarters along the river and fell right into its job.

Along the river bank were a number of German boats of all sizes that had been abandoned by their owners. Some of the men began tinkering with two of the larger ones, and managed to get them started. They



didn't have any definite plans in mind, until a medical officer asked them to establish a ferry to evacuate wounded men to the opposite side.

Sgts. John Stache and Roland O'Niel, T'5s Maurice Zohss, George Larson and Gank Green, and Pfc. Howard Izer and Stanislaw Pitler manned the boats in this operation. Later when the Hodges' Bridge was in and two-way traffic was allowed, the men used the boats to lay telephone wire across the river, so advance artillery observers and other units would have phone communication to the opposite bank.

During the wire-laying operation, the motor of the boat broke down. It was pretty old, and couldn't stand the constant use. The fellows dropped the anchor, but it wouldn't hold in the swift current. The boat was drifting rapidly toward the German lines. After some hasty repairs, the motor started, only to break down again when they had reached a spot opposite the company area. This time the boat was beached and destroyed. The second boat was then put into service, and the wire-laying was completed in spite of heavy enemy artillery fire on the river.

The lines were connected just in time for a call to come through to the artillery positions that the Germans were launching a counter-attack, and the resulting fire completely smashed the threat.

The ferry service quit completely when the company moved on down the river, but not before it had served a very useful purpose.

Turning northeast the 1st Battalion of the 309th cut the Autobahn, a superhighway running parallel to the Rhine from the great Ruhr industrial district to Frankfurt am Main. The Germans, it was now obvious, were fighting a disorganized battle, throwing every available man into action, without regard for fundamental military purpose.

On the 17th of March, a small convoy of a couple of jeeps and a C Company truck, with the whole of the 2nd Squad of the 3rd Platoon, was rolling along a road near Königswinter. This ground had already been













fought over, and the road was supposedly clear. The jeeps in the lead passed over a spot in the road with no ill effects, but when the truck came along, it set off a hidden mine, and Pvt. Edgar McCalmen, Pvt. Harold Elsebough, Pfc. Frank Jagacki and T/5 Johnny Marcum were wounded. A thorough search followed, and more mines were found. German civilians in the neighborhood were suspected of laying the mines, but there was no way of finding out just who was doing work behind our lines.

In the rapidly developing struggle, it became the job of the engineers to find the best route of advance for the infantry. We by-passed road craters and blown bridges, cleared abatis and other types of road blocks. We were quite relieved to find that the Germans did not have time to lay their customary mine fields.

When the lines moved forward, there were always tanks around to cover the advance of the infantry. With the lead tanks there was always a group of engineers hunting for mines, but with the tanks advancing as rapidly as they did, there were many side streets and seldom used roads that were passed by—unswept. This detail was left for later, when more engineers came along in a thorough search for hidden blocks. Picking up these scattered mines had become a habit with the engineers and there wasn't much danger, except when a booby-trapped mine was encountered. The enemy liked to make life miserable for all concerned, however, so he dropped in occasional artillery shells, which is called harrassing fire. It was on such an occasion, Sgt. Robert Steelman, Pvt. Carl Arnett, Pfc. Jimmie Lewis, and Pfc. Joseph James were inspecting a road near Honnef. They were minding their own business, pulling mines, when a barrage came in. One shell landed in a tree near the group, and a flying piece of shrapnel hit Arnett, wounding him so that he had to be evacuated. Such is the life of an engineer.

As we approached the town of Siegburg, ten miles from the junction of the Sieg River and the Rhine, we turned east and set up a line of defenses along the southern bank of the Sieg. Our mission was to guard the left flank of the First Army, on its drive to encircle the Ruhr Valley. The Division was stretched out facing the enemy on a forty-mile front, following the contour of the Sieg River. The Battalion was in direct support of the infantry, prepared to hold under any circumstances in case of a German counter-attack.

During this period, our Battalion, with Company D, 774th Tank Battalion, and the 78th Reconnaissance Cavalry Troop attached, constituted the Division Reserve. It was thus formed to strike immediately at any point along the forty-mile front, if, as, and when the Germans attempted to break through the Division lines.

Our companies held classes in platoon and squad infantry tactics, platoon efficiency firing tests, attack of fortified positions, and street





fighting. Reinforcements were instructed in mine warfare, techniques of minesweeping, and the organization of minesweeping parties.

The 78th Reconnaissance Cavalry Troop, a component of the Division Reserve, "Task Force Closner", (mentioned above), continued extensive reconnaissance of the Sieg River lines, with particular emphasis on the number and condition of bridges, possible fords, current and depth of the stream, and the presence and extent of enemy minefields on the north bank. Engineer troops accompanied and guided both reconnaissance and infantry patrols through minefields on these missions.

Prior to the crossing of the Sieg River by the infantry, on the 6th of April, it was necessary that one of the crossing sites near a demolished bridge be checked for anti-personnel mines. Since it was to be a dangerous mission, the suspected minefield and bridge were covered by enemy machine-guns, a volunteer was called for to make the initial crossing. T/5 David Reese, 1st Platoon, Company A, volunteered to make the night crossing.

Leaving all excess equipment behind, Reese cautiously wormed his way across the remains of the span. On the far side the approach had been dropped into the river, and much effort was required to scale the vertical wall which once had been the floor of the bridge.

Reaching the top, he proceeded to feel around the bank for the dreaded mines, which would warn the Germans of a crossing, and delay an attacking force until they could be removed.

"I felt that I was on a suicide mission, for no one knew where those machine-guns were, and in the dark, the only way I could find mines would be by striking one—blowing myself sky-high," T/5 Reese told his buddies, later.

After searching around a considerable area, and ascertaining that the Germans had not mined the vicinity of the bridge, the engineer inched his way back along his route, now marked with luminous tape, and reported his findings to the infantry.



Shortly after, the gap was spanned by an expedient foot-bridge, and the doughboys crossed safely to the enemy side, to begin the clean-up of the Ruhr Pocket.

For his part in the operation, T/5 Reese was awarded the Bronze Star on the recommendation of the infantry commander, Colonel Schulman.

Near the end of March, the First and Ninth Armies, after their spectacular dash eastward, made contact at Paderborn, completing the encirclement of the vital Ruhr industrial area. These two Armies then pushed on to the Elbe River, leaving behind a huge pocket that covered some 5000 square miles and contained well over 300,000 German troops. In a coordinated squeeze, the 78th Division was to push northward from its positions along the Sieg, while other First and Ninth Army units were to press in from the East and North.

The day after their short rest period, the men of C Co. were told that they were to make a fake attempted crossing of the Sieg River. They were to work with a cavalry unit, which would give them immediate cover, and an artillery unit that would cover the opposite bank with its shells, keeping any curious Krauts down in their holes.

Erect two spans of the Titus H. Frame Bridge, under cover of darkness, and then withdraw—that was their mission, and it all sounded very easy.

The men practiced setting up the bridge many times by daylight, and then loaded two trucks, and went in to get some sleep, for it would probably be a long night.

As T/5 Chalmers tells it—"After dinner, the Lieutenant got us together and explained the whole thing over again. We rehearsed our parts once more, and then set out on our mission. The river banks were as flat as a pool table, so they wouldn't afford us any cover in case we were fired upon. We were all thinking about that, when we rolled through a small town out into an open flat plain. Suddenly our thoughts were interrupted by a stream of tracer bullets arching across the sky towards us. T/5 Monaghan, our truck driver, slammed on the brakes, put the truck in reverse, and backed behind a house for safety."

"We waited until the firing subsided, and then Monaghan sped on toward the little town near the river. The road was rough, but we only hit the high spots, as that probing finger of 20mm fire kept searching for us through the night."

"It seemed like hours after we unloaded the trucks before we started down to the river with the bridging equipment. It was a relief to be doing something, other than sitting around and waiting."

"I was on the second H-frame as we started toward the river. The cavalry doughs were spread out around us, but you couldn't see them.. That artillery outfit was banging them in quite regularly on the opposite

















shore. Everything was going fine until someone set off a flare, and believe me, all of us thought our goose was cooked. The flare soon died down and nothing happened, so we kept going. It didn't take long to put up our two sections, and it didn't take us long to pull out, once we were finished. In another hour, we were on our way home, and two hours later we were crawling into our sacks."

The time for the crossing of the Sieg River and the plunge into the Ruhr Pocket was at hand. The C Company engineers were given the job of making the crossing, and getting all three infantry regiments to the other side.

On the 5th of April, the night before the crossing, S/Sgt. Paul Steffen and Cpl. Walter Underwood made the reconnaissance of the 1st Platoon's bridge site. They went down into the town of Dreisel and made an unscheduled meeting with an infantry patrol. Then they moved on, down the main street of the town which ran along the river bank. The highway bridge across the river had been blown, and they found that Tellermines had been dug in all along the street. The men started removing the mines, but apparently the Krauts didn't want all their hard work undone, so they opened fire. The men withdrew and returned to the company to bring up the 3rd squad and some mine detectors. When this new group went through the town, they drew no more fire, but found numerous mine blocks scattered all over the streets.

By dawn, the squad had finished removing the last mine, and the rest of the platoon arrived to put in the bridge.

The men assembled the sections of the bridge behind some houses, and by daylight they were all ready to set it up. There was no infantry around to give support, if it was needed, so Lieutenant Siegele deployed the squads in the houses to cover him while he swam across. T/4 Frank Momot, and Pvt. Russel Gaudet volunteered to help. The three doffed their heavy equipment, and walked toward the river bank. They were half-way across the open field which bordered the river, when the





Krauts opened up with machine-gun and rifle fire. Pvt. Gaudet was hit once in the neck, and when he turned to seek cover, he was hit again in the back. The Krauts creased Lt. Siegele's helmet with a bullet. Then the engineers in the houses opened up with their rifles.

Gaudet managed to run behind a house, but his wounds were so severe he could go no farther. He needed immediate medical attention, but the aid man had been left back at the C.P. Sgt. Ernest Collins ran back through the small arms fire to bring up the medic.

After two hours of fighting the engineers had accounted for eight Krauts. The skirmish ended when the infantry crossed the river farther upstream, and circled around behind the enemy, capturing those who were left.

The bridge still had to be put in, so Lt. Siegele made another attempt to swim across. The current was too swift, and he was forced to turn back. Pfc. Edward Temple tried to cross on the blown bridge, with the aid of a ladder, but it was too short to clear the span.

The engineers finally made the other side with an assault boat, and established the position of the anchor cable. Things went along smoothly in spite of the strong current, but, as the last section was moved into place, it became apparent that there wasn't enough bridging equipment to span the gap. Here, the expedient footbridge, newly invented by 1st Sgt. Glen Titus, came into prominence, and with a section of the Titus H-Frame at each end of the floating bridge, the crossing was completed.

The 2nd platoon of C Company built a bridge farther upstream, which enabled the infantry to cross and arrive at the opportune moment, at the 1st platoon's site. During the daytime, on the 5th of April, Lieutenant Glendon Timm conducted a reconnaissance of this site, with the help of Sgt. Stephen Monoski, and T/5 John Kapitan. Pfc. Simone Lagravinese went along as jeep driver.



The group arrived at their destination, a little town on the south bank of the Sieg, but the town had never before been entered by American troops, and was most certainly under observation from the other side, so the men decided it would be wiser to look the site over from a distance. Lagravinese turned off the main road and followed a little cow path up the hill to the edge of the woods and parked. Then the group walked along the edge of the woods until they came to another cow path, leading back to the main road. Sgt. Monoski and T/5 Kapitan went down this path, keeping their eyes open for some indication of the presence of the enemy on their side of the river. They had planned to meet the jeep back on the main road. Meanwhile back at the jeep, when Lagravinese tried to turn around, he found the vehicle was stuck, and he had to drive over a fence to get headed the other way. They were about half-way down the hill when two Kraut shells came in, exploding where the jeep had been stuck just a few moments before.

The next morning, before dawn, the engineers arrived to find the doughs already there. While the trucks were being unloaded, a group of engineers found some planks in a factory and began improving the blown bridge by putting in a wooden floor and rope hand-rails. Even with this improvement, the bridge was still unsatisfactory, but some doughs got across—climbing over and around the twisted remains of trestle bents. Enough doughs got across to capture 18 Krauts in a factory on the other side. These Krauts were the ones who had opened fire on the 1st platoon bridging crew, farther on down the river.

A regiment of infantry was still waiting to cross, so the engineers proceeded with the construction of their foot bridge. By tying the bridle lines to the remains of the other bridge they saved time, and before daylight 80 feet of floating bridge was completed, and one battalion of infantry had crossed. The 3rd Platoon was to erect its bridge across the Sieg at a little town just outside of Hamm. On the night of April 5, 1st Lieutenant William Monroe led S/Sgt. Karl Hanville and Sgt. John Stache on a reconnaissance patrol of the area. The town hadn't yet been checked by American troops, so the group decided it would be better to walk from the bivouac area in Hamm to the river. They found two bridges across the river had been blown. One was a long railroad bridge, and the other was a stone arch bridge for automobile traffic. The Krauts had done a good job on both. Another thing which made the men apprehensive of the crossing to come was the fact that there was more than 300 yards of flat open ground between the river and the town on the other side. Anything could happen there. The condition of the site itself would have made any engineer unhappy. The river was 145 feet wide; very swift and very deep.

The next morning at five o'clock the infantry deployed along the banks of the river, and the engineers moved in with their bridge equipment. A heavy fog covered the landscape and everything was quiet.





A truck load of assault boats was supposed to be in town to be used in the initial crossing, but had taken a wrong road during the night and ended up miles from the town. The engineers tried to swim the river, but the current was too swift. Finally the boats did arrive and six men paddled one across to secure the anchor cable. Pfc. Harold Fisher was more than surprised when, upon beaching the boat, he turned around and saw two Krauts sitting in foxholes just a few feet from the bank. They were quickly and quietly dispensed with, and the engineers then set about finishing their job.

The 3rd Squad proceeded to build the bridge while the rest of the platoon ferried infantry across in assault boats. When the bridge was partially done, one of the boats was carried downstream by the strong current, and crashed into the bridge. The bridge cable was torn out at its moorings and the bridge broke in a dozen places. Work had to be started all over again. One of the boats capsized, and the equipment in it was lost in the river.

After hours of back-breaking work, the span was completed, and the rest of the infantry regiment crossed. So far no enemy fire had been directed on the bridge, but now that the work was done, the shells started coming in. The infantry captured a group of Krauts who had been dug in along a railroad track only two hundred yards from the bridge site. It was presumed that they hadn't fired because of the heavy fog.

Using these three C Company bridges, the Division strength crossed the Sieg, and began to punch into the Ruhr Pocket. At first, the going was slow. We had many road craters to fill, blown bridges to by-pass, log barricades to clear, and mines to remove. The Division encountered the best troops that the Germans had available—Waffen-SS, Panzers, Parachute and Infantry units.

Here in the Pocket we ran into German Flak batteries used as anti-personnel weapons. They threw in self-propelled artillery and their biggest and best tanks in an effort to stop our advance. But the hard fight-



ing men of the 78th could not be stopped. The Division swept forward so rapidly that occasionally the engineers, in advance of the infantry, rode in on their trucks and captured towns. Engineer patrols were constantly probing ahead of the attack, seeking routes which would by-pass obstacles and allow our drive to continue unimpeded. The Germans finally began to realize that they were surrounded and the oncoming 78th demoralized them completely. The prisoner count for one day reached a record high of 9,186. There were days when the advance amounted to 11 miles over difficult terrain. To keep up the pace, the infantry rode trucks, dismounting only when resistance was encountered.

Thousands of slave laborers from countries overrun by the Nazi war machine were liberated and every man in the Battalion received a reward for his efforts from the eyes of these freed people.

Our work towards the closing days of the Pocket consisted mostly of clearing abandoned vehicles and debris from the roads so that our attacking armor and vehicles could continue unhindered.

On the 15th of April the city of Wuppertal (Germany's 5th largest), was taken by phone, and later that day its 400,000 inhabitants had surrendered to the 78th. In 11 days we had taken 120 towns and villages, advanced 50 miles, and captured 47,581 prisoners, including seven General Officers.

Two days later, after 128 days of continuous fighting, we were withdrawn from the line for a rest. Many of us heaved a sigh of relief as we looked forward to the imminent victory over Hitler Germany.

## OCCUPATIONAL DUTY

On the 18th of April, the Battalion moved to Dillenburg and neighboring villages. We had the security mission of guarding routes of communication and rear areas of the First Army. This left plenty of time for additional training and recreational activities.

A schedule of physical training, close order drill, classes on general engineer work, and field experience in the construction of various types of bridges kept everyone busy. During this month, a Battalion Field Meet was held in which C Company won the Battalion Championship.

The big news of the unconditional surrender of Germany on the 8th of May, 1945, was an occasion for celebrations. Our elation was tempered, however, by the knowledge that the war against Japan was still to be won. The newly-announced point system, with its weird evaluations and credits, meant that most of us had to be prepared for an indefinite period





of soldiering. Was it to be occupation or more fighting in Japan? That was the foremost question, and no one had the answer.

While we were in Dillenburg, we were informed about the Information and Education Program which the U.S. Army was to institute for troops not immediately destined for shipment to the Pacific. Until these classes were started, the Battalion provided refresher courses in reconnaissance, and men were given engineering problems to refresh their knowledge of engineering subjects. The companies were assigned, occasionally, to the construction of prisoner-of-war and displaced persons camps, and throughout the summer, men were detailed to make improvements in the facilities of the Division Rest Center on the Edersee.

We were given quotas of passes to Belgium, Holland, and Paris.

Our next zone of occupation was in the Fritzlar-Homberg district. Here we continued the training program begun at Dillenburg, and expanded our athletic activities. We constructed suspension bridges of various types, and built Bailey bridges in a number of different sizes, just to brush up on our technique—we were training for work in the Pacific Islands, we were told.

Division Headquarters was in nearby Bad Wildungen, to which we moved in June. Our billets were in a few of the many large hotels of this town—noted for its mineral baths. We proceeded with engineer training, but also had the opportunity to enjoy the entertainment facilities that



were provided for Division personnel; the movies, the Red Cross with the Division Band making nightly appearances, and the various plays staged by units in the Division.

In the latter part of July the Division was assigned the territory north of Kassel, and the Battalion was situated on the Weser River, in and about the town of Lippoldsberg. Shortly after we had settled down, the news of the surrender of Japan touched off spontaneous outbursts of revelry. We all knew now that there would be no more combat, and we all began to have dreams—in the daytime—of getting home.

An expanded athletic program, including softball games between the various teams of the Battalion, occupied a good deal of our time, in addition to the classes conducted by the Battalion "I & E", in such subjects as surveying, welding, typing, German and French, and many others. Battalion Special Service provided movies nightly, organized a "hot-lick" jazz band, and the Dogma Players produced several plays.

Throughout this period, men with sufficiently high point scores were being transferred out of the Battalion. Among the first to leave were Lt. Colonel Closner and Majors Gerleman and O'Connell.

Along about the middle of September, we began to hear rumors that the 78th Division was to be assigned to occupation duty in the American Zone of Berlin. Towards the last of October, rumor became reality, as advance parties from the Battalion moved out to assure sufficient housing facilities for the Battalion.

General Barker, the new Lightning Commander, in a speech to his unit, said he felt that our new assignment was the greatest task yet undertaken by the 78th: Occupational duty in the largest occupied city in the world is, indeed, a great tribute to a great fighting Division.









# BRONZE STARS

## COMPANY "A"

Captain	Phelen, Maurice P.	Tec 4	Reese, David S.
1st Lt	Carter, Harland H.	Cpl	Daly, Jesse L.
1st Lt	Thorington, James W.	Cpl	Godsie, Cecil W.
1st Lt	Repinsky, Henry J.	Cpl	Hutcherson, Franklin L.
1st Lt	Daley, William J.	Cpl	Larrabee, Leo J.
1st Lt	Hacker, William B.	Cpl	Spatta, Walter R.
S/Sgt	Ferretti, William P.	Cpl	Welch, John H.
S/Sgt	Schmidt, Gustav	Cpl	Williams, Samuel R.
S/Sgt	Seitz, John E.	Cpl	Nover, Joseph M. P.
S/Sgt	Shimer, George W.	Tec 5	Criswell, Frank L.
S/Sgt	DiPace, Philip	Tec 5	Gironda, William P.
Sgt	Bloom, Robert W.	Tec 5	Selecman, Reit E.
Sgt	Ferrell, Arthur L. Jr.	Tec 5	Sprenkel, Raymond W.
Sgt	Nutzman, Elmer O.	Tec 5	Klice, Louis
Sgt	Oelrich, Kenneth E.	Pfc	Keel, Carson
Sgt	Carlberg, Arthur J.	Pfc	Di Virgilio, Camello A.
Sgt	Layne, Aubrey O.	Pvt	Witkowski, Algard P.
Sgt	Burns, Bruce R.		

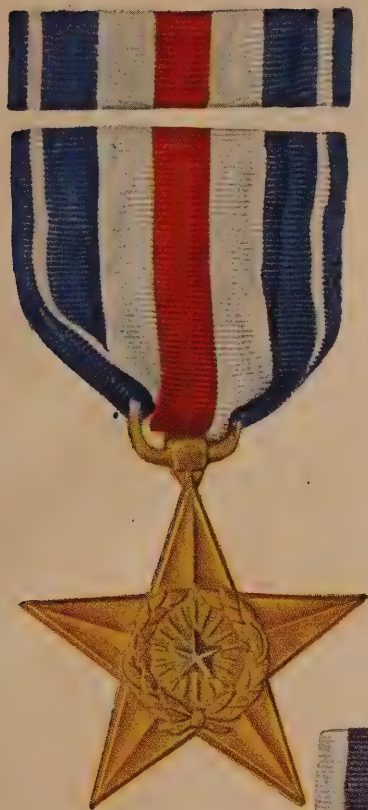
## COMPANY "B"

Captain	Rael, Zacarias	Cpl	Oney, J. B.
1st Lt	Blackburn, Herschel E.	Cpl	Wolfe, Donald R.
1st Lt	Young, Gordon S.	Cpl	Swartz, Harry L.
1st Lt	William, Frank S.	Cpl	Honkoski, Steve J.
1st Sgt	Broadwater, Colby M. Jr.	Tec 5	Kucharczyk, Donald
M/Sgt	Roark, Joseph A.	Tec 5	Garstensen, William H.
S/Sgt	Cullum, Herbert E.	Tec 5	Grace, Richard L.
S/Sgt	Gutowski, Julian A.	Tec 5	Hoinski, Chester
S/Sgt	Williams, Ivan F.	Tec 5	Norton, Roscoe A. Jr.
Sgt	Anderson, Robert W.	Ofc	Brant, Charles H.
Sgt	Apici, Joseph I.	Pfc	Beeks, John C.
Sgt	Straubing, Charles	Pfc	Griffith, William E.
Sgt	Erickson, Roy G.	Pfc	Morrissey, William T. Jr.
Sgt	Grant, William O.	Pfc	Pezzulo, Angelo J.
Sgt	Paavola, Leonard K.	Pfc	Pretzer, Richard R.
Sgt	Rhodes, Ernest A.	Pfc	Silvestri, Alphonse R.
Tec 4	Katoski, Albert R.	Pfc	Sinnett, Elmer L.
Tec 4	Athelm, Glen E.	Pfc	Wachenfeld, Stephan C.
Tec 4	Ball, Henderson A.	Pfc	Geske, James A.
Tec 4	Kewatt, Gerald L.	Pvt	Porter, Allen L.
Tec 4	Rosenstrauch, Fred	Pvt	Zimmermann, Glenn A.
Cpl	Day, Richard F.		

## COMPANY "C"

Captain	Camm, Frank A.	Tec 4	Sherman, George W.
1st Lt	Bondurant, Charles W. Jr.	Tec 4	Vouge, Robert V.
1st Lt	Daley, William J.	Cpl	Sisk, Charlie F.
1st Lt	Monroe, William R.	Cpl	Snyder, Richard O.
1st Lt	Timm, Glendon M.	Cpl	Underwood, Walter D.
2nd Lt	Siegels, Everett O.	Cpl	Teaford, Richard R.
1st Sgt	Titus, Glen C.	Tec 5	Ross, James, T.
S/Sgt	Dill, James L.	Tec 5	Chalmers, Benjamin W. Jr.
S/Sgt	Steffen, Paul J.	Pfc	Foley, Millard L.
Sgt	Burdick, Paul W.	Pfc	Taylor, John H.
Sgt	Higgins, Lawrence W.	Pfc	Zoladz, Joseph F.
Tec 4	Momot, Frank	Pvt	Gandet, Russell K.
Tec 4	Rockefeller, Kenneth	Pvt	Wheeler, Louis C.







## HEADQUARTERS AND SERVICE COMPANY

Captain	Largent, Rinardt L.	T/Sgt	Keffe, Christopher B.
Captain	Rhodes, Donald A.	T/Sgt	Mowrey, William R.
1st Lt	Trustdorf, Robert L.	T/Sgt	Truett, Earl A.
CWO	Wagner, Anthony M.	S/Sgt	Naylor, Edward L.
WOJG	Bryson, Thomas H.	S/Sgt	Alloway, Wilfrid J.
WOJG	Sherbergh, Thomas D.	Tec 4	Calamari, Andrew L.
M/Sgt	Luongo, Philip C.	Tec 4	Amate, Thomas R.
M/Sgt	Bunnell, Howard R.	Tec 4	Franklin, John J.
M/Sgt	Dugow, Martin L.	Tec 4	Walters, Edwin M.
M/Sgt	Haslett, William B.	Tec 5	Ackerman, Edward
M/Sgt	Schneider, Lawrence G.	Tec 5	Kurtz, Kenneth V.
1st Sgt	Thurston, Lewis E.	Tec 5	May, Albert E.
T/Sgt	Aikens, Robert C.	Tec 5	Pool, Marion A.
T/Sgt	Davidson, James E.	Pfc	MacDaniel, Joseph C.

## MEDICAL DETACHMENT

Captain	Goldstein, Earl S.	Tec 4	McGahey, Albert C.
Captain	Tedesco, Nunzio J.	Tec 5	Asina, Ladik J.
S/Sgt	Nagrant, Michael	Pfc	McMahon, Jack L.
Sgt	Schroder, John W.	Pvt	Reynolds, Arthur J.
Tec 3	Edwards, Harry J.		

## HEADQUARTERS

Lt. Col.	Closner, John J. Jr.	Captain	Schwarz, Henry A.
Major	Gerleman, Harry E.	1st Lt	Carpenter, William M.
Major	O'Connell, William J.	1st Lt	Hassell, Robert E.
Captain	Kulbok, Joseph A.	1st Lt	Morris, Harold B.
Captain	Lenassi, Leonard		

## OAK LEAF CLUSTERS

Major	Gerleman, Harry E.
Major	O'Connell, William J.
Captain	Kulbok, Joseph A.
Captain	Rhoades, Donald
1st Lt	Siegele, Everett O.
1st Lt	Monroe, William R.
1st Lt	Young, Gordon S.
S/Sgt	Steffen, Paul J.
Sgt	Erickson, Roy G.
Pfc	Beeks, John E.
Pfc	Pietraschke, Kenneth



# SILVER STARS

## COMPANY "A"

1st Lt	Repinsky, Henry J.
S/Sgt	Nutzman, Elmer O.
Sgt	Skelly, Francis E.

## COMPANY "B"

Captain	Rael, Zacarias	1st Lt
2nd Lt	Michener, Milton L.	Pfc
2nd Lt	Williams, Frank S.	Pfc
Sgt	Straubing, Charles R. III	Pfc
Tec 5	Gravienese, Raymond P.	Pvt
Pfc	English, Wallace A.	Pvt
Pvt	Falk, Herbert	

## COMPANY "C"

Phelan, Maurice
Albough, Pearl B.
Davis, James T.
Fisher, Harold R.
Hart, Kenneth G.
Storkel, Kurt

## MEDICAL DETACHMENT

Tec 5	Katoski, Albert R.
-------	--------------------

# PURPLE HEARTS

Adair, Norman W.  
 Albright, Samuel L.  
 Anderson, Vernon D.  
 Ayotte, Clifford J.  
 Bentley, Edward R.  
 Berloff, Herman D.  
 Blaine, John L.  
 Bowman, James E.  
 Braun, Joseph  
 Breitberg, Ronald F.  
 Broomhead, Robert H.  
 Cacciatore, Roy N.  
 Carlberg, Arthur J.  
 Cicotte, Marvin E.  
 Clarr, David H. Jr.  
 Coran, William G.  
 Graig, Edwin G.  
 Crouse, John W.  
 Daley, William J.  
 Dally, Jesse L.  
 Davis, James T.  
 Dickens, Ray R.  
 Dora, James E.  
 Duvall, Robert H.  
 Eckroat, Wilburg L.  
 Elliot, Carl R.  
 English, Wallace A.  
 Erickson, Roy G.  
 Evens, Robert M.  
 Eyre, James E.  
 Fischer, Leo F.

Fitzwater, Gordon W.  
 Fryer, James W.  
 Gardner, Richard A.  
 Gaudet, Russell K.  
 Gestring, Bureen G.  
 Gigliuto, Vincent  
 Gray, Alfred A.  
 Hannon, Robert R.  
 Higgins, Lawrence L.  
 Hoffman, Darrel W.  
 Hunt, Wylie J.  
 Hutcherson, Franklin L.  
 Jack, Clarence T.  
 Jagacki, Frank J.  
 Jensen, Kenneth K.  
 Jepson, Laverne E.  
 Jones, Earl D.  
 Keel, Carson  
 Kilpatrick, Warren K.  
 Kollman, Albert J.  
 Kolvenbach, Gordon F.  
 Kurtz, Kenneth V.  
 McCalmon, Edgar R.  
 McKinney, Walter J.  
 Mahaffey, Dean M.  
 Marcum, Johnnie  
 Mejia, Alfred M.  
 Miller, Francis M.  
 Miller, Leo J.  
 Miteff, Eldon L.  
 Murray, Joseph G.

Naylor, Edward L.  
 Nigl, Arlyn F.  
 O'Brien, James C.  
 Oney, J. B.  
 Orland, John J.  
 Paavola, Lennard K.  
 Passmore, William E.  
 Phelan, Maurice P.  
 Posner, Bernard  
 Repinsky, Henry J.  
 Roeming, Clarence  
 Schroeder, Donald W.  
 Selecman, Reid E.  
 Shepherd, Charles F.  
 Smith, C. J.  
 Smith, Jimmie G.  
 Spence, Larence R.  
 St. Pierre, Willie J.  
 Thorington, James W.  
 Trianni, Salvator J.  
 Vinchkoski, Leonhard J.  
 Warren, George L. Jr.  
 Will, Clarence L.  
 Williams, Frank S.  
 Williams, Ivan F.  
 Wilson, Andrew R.  
 Wilson, Bruce A.  
 Wolfe, Donald R.  
 Worth, Edward M.  
 89 Young, Gordon S.



# OUR BILLETS



**"B" Company Billets**



**Entrance to Billets**



**Battalion Headquarters**



# COMPANY CLUBS



N. C. O. Club



H & S Company Club Bar

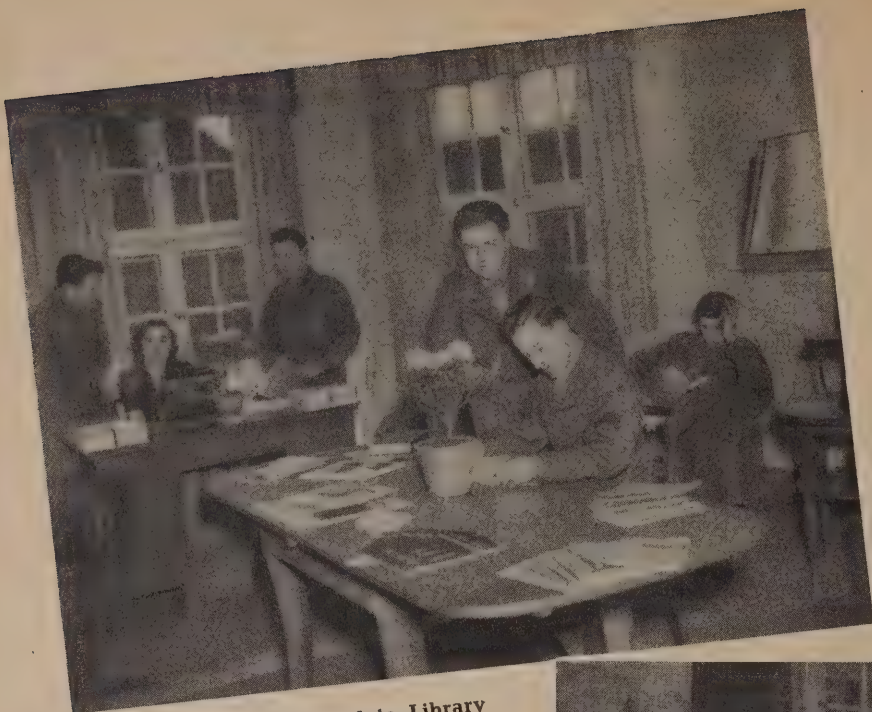


Outside view of "B" Company Club



Dancing at a Company Club





A well stocked up to date Library  
for all who wish to read



Eating at the Service Club Snack Bar



Dancing at the Service Club

# CASTLE SERVICE CLUB







DRUCKHAUS TEMPELHOF  
BERLIN-TEMPELHOF

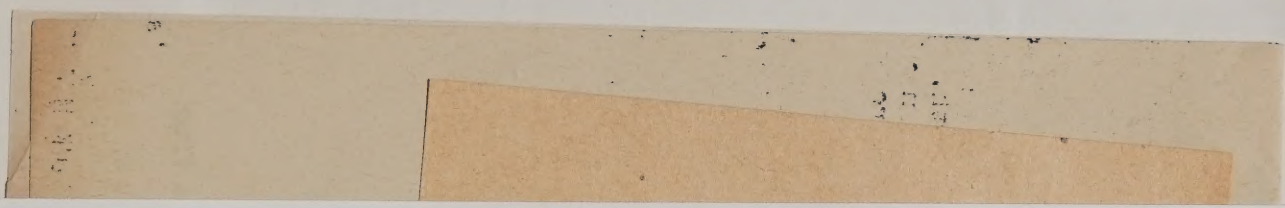













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**Capt. G.S. Young 01105943**

252 Engr. Bn.

APO 755

c/o P.M.N.Y., N.Y.

From 1 Dec. 1946 to 1 June 1947 contact:

**Lt. C.M. Broadwater Jr. 02029614**

252 Engr. Bn.

APO 755

c/o P. M. N. Y., N. Y.



HEADQUARTERS & 7TH INFANTRY DIVISION  
APO 78 US ARMY

10 May 1946

GENERAL ORDERS )

NUMBER 92 )

BATTLE HONORS

BATTLE HONORS. Under the provisions of Section IV, War Department Circular 333, 22 December 1943, as amended, the 303rd Engineer Combat Battalion, 78th Infantry Division, is cited as follows:

The 303rd Engineer Combat Battalion of the 78th Infantry Division is cited for outstanding performance of duty in action against the enemy. On 13 December 1944, the line companies of the 303rd Engineer Combat Battalion were placed in direct support of the assault infantry units whose mission it was to go through one of the most heavily defended sectors of the Siegfried Line. Despite the unceasing fire of direct, observed and previously zeroed artillery, mortars and small arms, and the adversities of snow and freezing weather, the men of the 303rd Engineer Combat Battalion cleared roads of mines, gapped anti-tank and anti-personnel minefields, and neutralized enemy emplacements to assist the Infantry in gaining its initial objectives. Engineer casualties were high but the attack moved on.

The German Wehrmacht launched its mighty Ardennes counter offensive on 16 December just to the south of the Division zone. In order to prevent the German hordes from turning North it was necessary to establish a complete barrier system around the Division zone in as short a time as possible. The 303rd Engineers worked mainly at night in No Man's Land between friendly and enemy lines. Braving atrocious weather conditions and suffering severe casualties from intense concentrations of enemy mortar fire, the men worked themselves to the point of exhaustion in order to complete the task of laying 15,000 anti-tank mines, 1,700 anti-personnel mines, 30 miles of barbed wire, countless abatis, and many prepared and executed road craters. As the installation of the barrier system progressed, demolition teams of the 303rd Engineer Combat Battalion assisted the infantry in limited objective attacks on numerous strategic pillboxes.

As the German Ardennes offensive was being strangled the 303rd Engineers made plans with the Infantry for the forthcoming long and arduous drive which ultimately culminated in the capture of the Schwammenauel Dam.

On the clear moonlit night of 28 January 1945, men of the 303rd Engineer Combat Battalion, wearing white snow capes, moved 2,000 pounds of TNT into the town of Konzen well forward of the infantry outposts. Infiltration tactics had to be used as the enemy was situated on the high ground flanking the town. When Konzen and its surrounding towns were taken the drive aimed North. With complete disregard for personal safety and fearless determination, men of the 303rd Engineer Combat Battalion, riding the lead tanks, cleared roads into such German strong points as Strauch and Schmidt.

With the capture of the mighty Dam a reconnaissance team of engineers, displaying initiative and courage under heavy fire, fought their way into the bowels of the structure to prevent its demolition by the Germans. The drive for the Rhine could begin.

The 303rd Engineer Combat Battalion fought gallantly and paid a great price in casualties to reflect the highest credit on itself and the armed forces of the United States.

BY COMMAND OF MAJOR GENERAL KEATING:

E. E. BARNES,  
Colonel, G.S.C.  
Chief of Staff

OFFICIAL :

(s) H.W. ORCUTT

(t) H.W. ORCUTT,  
Lt Colonel, AGD,  
Deputy Adjutant General

I certify that this is a true  
copy.

-1-

FREDERICK M. JAY  
2nd Lt Fa Adj



